

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES:
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

2000-2001 REPORT

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PREFACE BY THE CHAIR

The last year has been one of transition for the European Affairs Committee. With the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999, the Committee focussed on assuring that Wales had effective means of relating to the European Union and the United Kingdom's permanent representation in Brussels and UK government departments. New structures had to be developed and the Committee was instrumental in ensuring that the Assembly was building relationships in Europe, including relations with other European Union regional governments, as a newly devolved administration within the United Kingdom.

During the last year the Committee has monitored and built on those relationships. It has been pleasing to see that the Assembly has established a presence in Brussels and increased recognition of Wales as a region within the United Kingdom, including through opportunities for Assembly Ministers to participate in Council of Ministers meetings and to lead a UK delegation. The Committee has also provided a valuable opportunity for Wales' representatives within Europe, Assembly Members, and myself representing the administration to discuss events within Europe and suggest options for action. Matters considered include the implications of European presidency priorities and the Commission's work programme and how Wales should respond to longer term issues such as the future enlargement of the Union, the Commission's white paper on governance and the role of the regional tier of government within the European Union.

The last year has also seen the Committee consider its role including the question of how the Assembly can effectively manage the volume of legislation and other documents emanating from the European Union. The Committee considered the models of the UK and Scottish Parliaments and concluded that the Assembly would be best served by the Committee facilitating the effective handling of European legislation and policies throughout the Assembly rather than by attempting the near impossibility of itself scrutinising the full range of European legislation. A priority for the Committee for the coming year is therefore improving the co-ordination of European matters between the subject committees and ensuring effective processes are in place for their consideration by policy divisions.

The Committee will also have an important role in the coming years in developing thinking on the medium to longer term future of Wales in Europe. Changes such as enlargement will affect the structure of the European Union and the United Kingdom's and Wales' relative representation. It will also move Wales further from the geographical centre of Europe and change the future shape of, and Wales' access to, the structural funds. Preparing for these changes in future years requires public consideration and debate now so we can determine where Wales' interests lie and think about maximising the opportunities they provide. The Committee is uniquely placed to advance this debate and help steer Wales to a prosperous future as a European region.

Rhodri Morgan AM MP
Chair, European Affairs Committee

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE 2000-2001 REPORT

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. The remit of the Committee on European Affairs is set out in Standing Order 15 (Annex A). A list of its members is at Annex B. This Report is made under Standing Order 15.5 and is intended to inform the Assembly's annual debate on matters related to the European Union under Standing Order 6.5.

1.2. In broad terms, the purpose of the European Affairs Committee is to ensure that a coherent strategic approach is adopted by the National Assembly in relation to Europe. The Committee is intended to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the Assembly's responsibilities in relation to the European Union in each of the subject committees. However, its role is not to take the place of subject committees but to support them and ensure they are not operating in isolation from each other.

1.3. In order to facilitate a free and continuous exchange of information between Assembly members and Welsh representatives in the various European institutions, the Standing Orders allow the participation at the Committee's meetings of Welsh Members of the European Parliament and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions. The Committee has extended this invitation to Welsh representatives on the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), and the European Commission Representation in Wales.

2. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES TO DATE

2.1. Standing Orders require the Committee to keep under review:

- (i) the Assembly's relations with the institutions of the European Union, and its methods for informing and advising those institutions of the needs of Wales;
- (ii) the Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKRep, and with United Kingdom government departments on European issues;
- (iii) the Assembly's methods and procedures for the consideration of documents, issues and questions emanating from European institutions, having particular regard to the need for liaison with Members of Parliament responsible for scrutiny of European matters of particular relevance to Wales.

2.2. The Committee is also required to:

- (i) monitor the general impact and consequences for Wales of policies pursued by institutions of the European Union, and

- (ii) ensure that there is adequate liaison with Members of the European Parliament representing Wales and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions.

2.3. The Committee may assess and where necessary report on the significance of proposed European legislation affecting Wales that falls within the remit of more than one subject committee.

2.4. The Committee's activities in each of these fields is considered below.

a) The Assembly's relations with the institutions of the European Union

2.5. The Committee has continued to review the Assembly's relations with European Union institutions through the participation of representatives of those institutions in committee proceedings and giving detailed consideration to particular issues as they arise. Review of the Assembly's executive's relationship with European institutions has also occurred through the First Minister's reporting of recent events and consequent round table discussion of the Assembly's activity.

Committee of the Regions and other organisations

2.6. The National Assembly had one full member of the Committee of the Regions, who was also a member of the European Affairs Committee, John Griffiths AM, and one alternate representative, Elin Jones AM. It also had one full member and one alternate on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, which was a part of the Council of Europe. The Committee recommended that the Assembly become a member of the Conference of the Peripheral and Maritime Regions and, in light of that experience, consider joining the Assembly of European Regions in the future. A representative of the Assembly of European Regions spoke to the Committee in November 2000 and the President of the Conference of the Peripheral and Maritime Regions addressed the Committee in April 2001.

The Assembly in Brussels

2.7. The year 2000 saw the Assembly establishing for itself a presence in Europe by setting up its Office in Brussels and becoming a member of the Wales European Centre. This has provided a base from which the Assembly can build relationships in the physical centre of the European Union's institutions. The Head of the Brussels Office and representatives from the WEC have also provided feedback to the Committee on the Assembly's pursuit of issues within the Commission and the European Parliament and highlighted matters for further attention. Work of Assembly Ministers at Council meetings is noted below in discussions of liaison arrangements with UKRep.

Presidency Priorities

2.8. In November 2000 the Committee heard from Mr Thomas Rosander, Minister and Deputy chief of Mission at the Embassy of Sweden on the issues to be pursued by Sweden

during its Presidency of the European Union. This was a valuable forum for informing the Committee of how Sweden hoped to take the European Union ahead during that time. The Committee had also arranged for a similar presentation in June 2001 from the Belgian Ambassador on the Belgian Presidency.

INTERREG

2.9. The Committee considered a review of the INTERREG II 1994-99 programme and an update of the INTERREG III 2000-06 programme. INTERREG II enabled a host of innovative cross-border ventures between Wales and Ireland establishing new links and co-operative economic development activity. While the programme had been a success, the Committee noted that Welsh partners had only used 78% of their funding and that a publicity exercise would be undertaken to ensure increased take up of Welsh funds for INTERREG III.

Staff Development

2.10. The Assembly's promotion of secondment opportunities for its staff with institutions of the European Union was examined by the Committee. The Committee considers such secondments to be an effective means of raising the expertise and understanding of the European Union amongst the Assembly's staff and developing personal links with those institutions. During the year, a number of staff took up stagiaire posts in Brussels, a secondment was arranged with the European Commission's representation in Wales and two secondments for National Assembly staff with UKRep were advertised for filling later in 2001. A rolling programme of awareness raising sessions for staff on European issues was introduced.

b) The Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKRep and the UK Government

2.11. The Committee has been kept informed of the Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKRep and the UK Government through reports by the First Minister and the Head of the Brussels Office, who has UKRep accreditation. The Committee was pleased to see that the Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning had led the UK delegation at the Youth Council in Brussels in November 2000. The Minister for Rural Affairs attended an Agriculture Council in November, the Minister for Health and Social Services attended a Health Council in December and the Minister for the Environment was scheduled to attend an Environment Council but last minute changes to the agenda meant that she met with the Commission and Wales European Centre instead. The participation of these Ministers in representing the UK within the European Union was a great step forward and has helped to raise the profile of Wales within Europe and increased the Assembly's understanding of the operation of Council meetings. The Economic Development Minister also met a number of Commission representatives and Members of the European Parliament in Brussels in December to examine the scope for improved incentives for Welsh business in Wales' Objective 1 area and the Assembly's Business Manager met senior Commission officials to discuss E Europe.

c) The Assembly's procedures for the scrutiny of European matters

2.12. The Committee gave substantial consideration to the Assembly's handling of European legislation and the most effective role for the Committee in its scrutiny. The Committee considered a range of options on how it could best ensure the Assembly had adequate input into legislative proposals without overwhelming members with the vast amount of European Union documentation produced every year, much of which was not directly relevant to Wales or warranting specific comment. The House of Commons' and Scottish Parliament's procedures for detailed legislative scrutiny were examined and found not to be practical for application in Wales. The Committee noted the need for it and the subject committees to have more systematic and targeted information on significant European Union legislative proposals and policy and funding initiatives. The Committee noted that the information provided to it by the First Minister, the Head of the Brussels Office, the Commission Representation in Wales, the Wales European Centre and representatives of the Committee of the Regions and ECOSOC was invaluable in keeping it informed of forthcoming proposals. Similarly, the Committee's own examination of the Commission's annual work programme, Council resolutions and Presidency priorities helped alert the Committee to strategic priorities. The Committee undertook detailed examination of the Commission's work programme in March 2001 in order to highlight issues of importance to Wales for consideration by the appropriate committees and bodies. Improving the means by which Assembly committees are kept informed of relevant legislative proposals remains a priority for the Committee for the coming year.

d) Monitoring the general impact and consequences for Wales of policies pursued by institutions of the European Union

Euro Taskforce in Wales

2.13. The Committee heard from the Chair and the Taskforce Manager of the Euro Taskforce for Wales on its programme of action to prepare small and medium sized enterprises in Wales for the launch of the single currency in Europe. The Committee noted that the introduction of the Euro by its nearest neighbours will have a significant impact on many businesses in Wales and that there needed to be simple ways of accessing quality information on how to handle this change. The Committee also suggested that this issue be debated by Plenary.

Nice European Summit

2.14. The Committee noted the outcomes of the European Summit in Nice, particularly the preparations for enlargement of the Union and the implications that may have for Wales' and the UK's representation within the Union and the future shape of European governance. The Committee also noted the discussions on the competences of the regional, nation state and European tiers of government and the plans for further consultations on questions of

governance leading up to an Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. The Committee was keen for the Assembly to have a full input in response to the Commission's white paper on governance which was due to be published in July 2001.

Enlargement

2.15. The Wales European Centre submitted its draft strategy on enlargement to the committee as a part of the Centre's consultation process on the strategy. The Committee noted both the threats posed by enlargement, with the potential loss of employment and structural funds to new members of the European Union, and the opportunities offered for developing new economic and social relations and for taking advantage of Wales' areas of expertise within the expanded market. While the potential benefits appeared considerable, strategic action was needed to ensure that Wales made the most of the opportunities available. The Assembly had an important role in this regard in providing political leadership to facilitate a co-ordinated and targeted approach within Wales.

European Charter of Fundamental Rights

2.16. The Assembly's Public Administration, Equality and Public Appointments Division informed the Committee of the implications for Wales of the joint proclamation by the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter combines in a single text the civil, political, economic, social and societal rights hitherto laid down in a variety of International European or national sources. The Charter is intended to protect the fundamental rights of individuals against action taken by the institutions of the Union and by Member States in the application of treaties and to make the existing fundamental rights more visible for the citizens. However, the Charter was not binding on member states and it was consequently difficult to predict its future implications for Wales.

Wales European Forum

2.17. The future direction for the Wales European Forum was considered by the Committee. It noted that there were competing notions of what shape the Forum should take. To date the Forum had been a mechanism for sharing information about Europe with the public, private and voluntary sectors but it was suggested that there would be significant benefit if it became more of a place for the exchange of information and ideas as a kind of a "think tank". The Committee identified the need for both roles to be fulfilled and agreed to explore these options further at future meetings.

e) Ensure that there is adequate liaison with Members of the European Parliament representing Wales and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions

2.18. The Committee provides an opportunity to improve liaison between Members of the European Parliament representing Wales and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions by bringing them together at its meetings. Unfortunately, scheduling clashes

between the European Affairs Committee and the European Parliament have usually prevented Wales' Members of the European Parliament attending Committee meetings. The Committee intends to address this difficulty during the coming year.

f) Assess the significance of proposed European legislation affecting Wales that falls within the remit of more than one subject committee

2.19. The Committee did not consider any proposed European legislation.

3. EUROPEAN COMMITTEES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM MEETINGS

3.1. The Committee was represented at the inaugural meeting of the Chairs of European Committees of United Kingdom Parliaments on 3 November 2000 in Glasgow and the second meeting in Belfast on 16 March 2001. As the First Minister was not available to attend as Chair of the Assembly's committee, the Committee nominated Val Feld AM to attend in his place. A clerk to the Committee also attended.

3.2. These meetings provided a valuable opportunity to share experience in dealing with European issues and to facilitate ongoing co-operation between the committees.

3.3. The March 2001 meeting decided that it would be useful if the Autumn 2001 meeting was held in Brussels to enable the chairs to meet with UKRep officials there and visit the offices of devolved administrations. The National Assembly had volunteered to host the Autumn meeting, but the First Minister has agreed to the Assembly organising the meeting in Brussels.

4. PARTICIPATION BY STANDING INVITEES

Under standing order 15.4, Members of the European Parliament representing Wales and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions may attend meetings of the European Affairs Committee. The Committee has extended this invitation to Welsh representatives on the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC); and the European Commission Representation in Wales. These standing invitees participated in the following meetings:

8 June 2000

Jill Evans MEP

Catherine Eva, Head of European Commission Representation in Wales

30 November 2000

Elin Jones AM, Member of the Committee of the Regions

Catherine Eva, Head of European Commission Representation in Wales

31 January 2001

Cllr Jon Huish, Member of the Committee of the Regions
Catherine Eva, Head of European Commission Representation in Wales
Dr Rose D'Sa, Member of ECOSOC

4 April 2001

George Wright, Member of ECOSOC

The Assembly's membership of the Wales European Centre has also meant that WEC officials have often been invited to participate in meetings. Jos Gallacher, the Director of the WEC, attended the meetings on 30 November 2000, 31 January 2001 and 4 April 2001.

5. FORWARD LOOK

A priority for the Committee for the coming year includes improving the co-ordination of European issues between subject committees and policy divisions. Much of the focus of the Committee to date has been on ensuring that Wales has appropriate links with Europe. These have been greatly improved through establishing the Assembly Office in Brussels, joining the Wales European Centre and increasing representation in Council of Ministers meetings. With these mechanisms now in place, the committee has turned to ensuring that there are adequate processes within the Assembly to call to attention European issues of interest to Wales in time for the Assembly to have an input at the policy development stage. Wales can then take maximum advantage of the opportunities which Europe offers.

The Committee plans to improve its communication with the subject committees by designating a rapporteur from each of the subject committees with which it shares membership to be responsible for keeping the European Affairs Committee up to date on European issues within that subject committee. Rapporteurs will inform the subject committee on emerging European issues and their wider strategic context. It will also regularly invite subject committee chairs to discuss issues of mutual concern and has requested that subject committees report specifically on European issues within their progress reports.

The Committee has also requested that the First Minister provide it with a report on each European Commission work programme outlining issues of potential significance within the portfolio of each Assembly Minister. This will ensure that policy divisions are aware of relevant upcoming European work and highlight for the Committee issues which may need to be raised with the responsible subject committee.

The Committee will maintain its role of being the central point within the Assembly for Wales' European representatives to publicly discuss issues of importance and inform the Assembly of recent developments. To this end, the Committee has undertaken to ensure that at least one meeting a year is held at a time and place convenient for Wales' Members of the European Parliament as MEPs' attendance has been frustrated due to the Committee's sitting times clashing with European parliamentary duties.

The Committee has also noted that in the longer term the Assembly needs to address the issues of European governance, the enlargement of the European Union, the future of the structural funds and the common agricultural policy and the introduction of Euro cash. The Committee has an important strategic role and will continue to monitor developments in these areas and ensure that appropriate, timely action is taken by the Assembly. Sustainable development is another issue on the European Union agenda which the Committee has flagged for further consideration.

ANNEX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE

STANDING ORDER 15 - Committee on European Affairs

Title and Terms of Reference

15.1 There shall be a Committee on European Affairs, which shall keep under review

- (i) the Assembly's relations with the institutions of the European Union, and its methods for informing and advising those institutions of the needs of Wales;
- (ii) the Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKRep, and with United Kingdom government departments on European issues;
- (iii) the Assembly's methods and procedures for the consideration of documents, issues and questions emanating from European institutions, having particular regard to the need for liaison with Members of Parliament responsible for scrutiny of European matters of particular relevance to Wales.

15.2. The Committee shall monitor the general impact and consequences for Wales of policies pursued by institutions of the European Union, and ensure that there is adequate liaison with the Members of the European Parliament representing Wales and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions.

15.3. The Committee shall avoid duplicating the work of subject committees, but may draw particular issues to the attention of relevant subject committees. The Committee may assess and where necessary report on the significance of proposed European legislation affecting Wales that falls within the remit of more than one subject committee.

Membership

15.4 The Assembly shall elect an Assembly Secretary to chair the Committee, together with other Members elected so far as practicable to reflect the balance of political groups in the Assembly and having regard to the desirability of each subject committee being represented on the Committee. Members of the European Parliament representing Wales, and Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions, may attend and, with the permission of the chair, speak at the Committee's meetings when these are in public, but they may not vote. Assembly Members who have specific constituency or regional interests to pursue in relation to the work of the Committee may in advance of any meeting seek the chair's permission to make representations to the Committee at that meeting, but they may not vote. Members may also write to the chair requesting that their observations on any aspect of the Committee's work be tabled for consideration by the Committee at its next meeting, and the chair shall arrange for such tabling to take place.

Reports

15.5 The Committee shall report to the Assembly from time to time.

ANNEX B: MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

The membership of the Committee as at June 2001 is:

Rhodri Morgan (Chair)	Labour	Cardiff West
Nicholas Bourne	Conservative	Mid & West
Rosemary Butler	Labour	Newport West
Christine Chapman	Labour	Cynon Valley
Val Feld	Labour	Swansea East
Mike German	Liberal Democrat	South Wales East
John Griffiths	Labour	Newport East
Jonathan Morgan	Conservative	South Wales Central
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Plaid Cymru	Ynys Mon
Alun Pugh	Labour	Clwyd West
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru	Carmarthen East & Dinefwr
Phil Williams	Plaid Cymru	South Wales East

Former Members

Alun Michael (Labour: Mid West):

Chair 23.06.99-29.02.00

Member 29.02.00 - 30.04.00

Delyth Evans (Labour: Mid & West)

Member 30.04.01-09.01.1.00

Elin Jones (Plaid Cymru: Ceredigion):

Member 23.06.99 - 01.02.00

Jocelyn Davies (Plaid Cymru: South Wales)

Member 01.02.00-09.11.00

William Graham (Conservative: South Wales East)

Member 23.06.99-14.09.99

Rod Richards (Conservative: North Wales)

Member 23.06.99-14.09.99

Christine Gwyther (Labour: Carmarthen West & S Pembrokeshire)

Member 23.06.99-09.11.00

Alun Pugh (Labour: Clwyd West)

Member 23.06.99-09.11.00

Mick Bates (Liberal Democrat: Montgomeryshire)

Member 23.06.99-08.05.01

ANNEX C: MEETINGS AND AGENDAS OF THE COMMITTEE

8 June 2000

- Chair's Report
- INTERREG
- Secondments
- Welsh participation in European Organisations
- Influencing European Union Policies
- Review of the Committee's work to date and the Committee's draft Annual Report
- Sources of Information on EU issues

30 November 2000

- Chair's Report
- Assembly of European Regions
- Future Role of the European Affairs Committee
- Priorities of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union
- The Euro Taskforce for Wales
- EU Charter on Fundamental Rights

31 January 2001

- Chair's Report
- Future Role of the European Affairs Committee
- Enlargement of the European Union
- EU Charter on Fundamental Rights
- The Wales European Forum

4 April 2001

- Chair's Report
- Annual Work Programme of the European Commission
- Future role of the Committee on European Affairs
- Draft Annual Report of the Committee on European Affairs
- The Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions

23 May 2001

- Chair's Report
- Future Activity of the Committee on European Affairs
- Annual Report of the Committee on European Affairs
- Governance
- Wales European Forum
- Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions and the Assembly of European Regions
- Reports from Standing Invitees

ANNEX D: REPORT BY JOHN GRIFFITHS AM ON THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, SEPTEMBER 2000 – JUNE 2001

I became a member of the Committee in August 2000 and have attended all four of the plenary sessions held over the subsequent period: on 20/21 September; 13/14 December; 14/15 February; and 4/5 April.

The Committee's strategic work programme for 2000-2001 was adopted in June 2000 and is based on the five main principles of its work:

- drawing up opinions, both those referred to it by the Commission and on the Committee's own initiative;
- outside and extraordinary activities;
- studies which support previous guidelines;
- inter-institutional co-operation;
- communication and other events.

The programme for 2000-2001 has concentrated on the following key points:

- implementation of Agenda 2000 (reform of Structural Funds; common agricultural policy & rural development);
- enlargement;
- the Intergovernmental Conference 2000;
- employment;
- the environment;
- urban policy.

I am also a member of Commission 5, which has been engaged in work on social policy & public health; research; and tourism.

Plenary session of 20/21 September 2000

This was the first time that the CoR and the European Parliament had met at the same time and place, which made an important contribution to the establishment of closer relations between the two bodies. CoR members had the opportunity to meet their counterparts at national, political and Committee level. There was a majority in both bodies in favour of repeating this initiative the following year.

The European Parliament's President, Nicole Fontaine, addressed CoR members. She said that decentralisation and European integration were not conflicting, but complementary processes. She also talked about the challenge of combining integration with enlargement in the 21st century. The integration process has accelerated over the past decade, with the introduction of the internal market, the single currency, the free movement of people, the European judicial area and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. These achievements could either be consolidated by enlargement - completing the reunification of the whole

continent - or they could gradually be watered down. Ms Fontaine argued that, in order to meet this challenge, the next Intergovernmental Conference needed to be bold, resolving issues such as qualified majority voting, and establishing a Charter of Fundamental Rights and a European Constitution. The people of Europe would need to play an active part in this process and the members of the CoR could play a vital role in encouraging this engagement. Finally, Ms Fontaine called for an extension and deepening of the co-operation between the CoR and the European Parliament.

The session was also addressed by the European Commissioner for Transport and Interinstitutional Relations, Loyola de Palacio, who discussed a range of transport issues, including the use of renewable energy, improvements in efficiency and safety, and moves towards a trans-European rail freight network.

The session agreed opinions and resolutions on:

- the place of regional and local authorities in the EU's Euro-Mediterranean strategy;
- the information society and regional development, and enterprise policy in the knowledge economy;
- road and maritime safety;
- greenhouse gas emissions and climate change;
- the promotion of renewable energy;
- the local dimension of European Employment Strategy;
- a European Constitution and a Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Plenary session, 13/14 December 2000

The guest speaker was Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Education and Culture. She talked about a number of issues, including the economic advantages of digital technologies in the aftermath of the Lisbon European Council; the European Year of Languages: 2001; the White Paper on Youth Policy; and cultural diversity in sport and the campaign against the use of drugs to enhance sporting performance. Her visit prompted a discussion on the future of education, especially "e-learning" and electronic communications. Considerable attention was also paid to social issues, with opinions on equal opportunities, combating social exclusion and the Social Agenda.

Opinions and resolutions were also adopted on:

- new forms of governance: Europe, a framework for citizens' initiative. This was the most contentious opinion, addressing the questions of whether the Charter of Fundamental Rights should be legally binding; whether the Commission should be seen as the EU's political steering group; and whether the composition of the Commission should reflect voting in European elections.
- regional policy (European Charter of Regional Self-Government; ERDF; Article 299);
- the Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- authorised dimensions & measures for road vehicles;
- energy efficiency;
- public services (competition in postal services; award of public service contracts);

- community action on public health;
- employment policies and rights at work;
- interregional rural tourism.

Plenary session, 14/15 February 2001

The session was attended by the Swedish Minister for Administration and Democratic Issues, Mrs Britta Lejon, and the EU's Commissioner for regional policy, Mr Michel Barnier. It culminated in the adoption of a Declaration on the Commission's work programme for 2001. A COR/Czech Republic Joint Committee was also set up.

Mrs Lejon presented the Swedish Presidency's programme for the first six months of 2001 and highlighted the points in common with the Committee of the Regions' priorities. These included enlargement, employment and the environment, as well as the situation "post-Nice", in particular the apportionment of powers among the nation States, the European Union and the regions. The Presidency and the Committee would be asking what role the regional and local authorities would play in the decision-making process of an enlarged Europe, and how the public could be better informed about "what Europe is doing".

Commissioner Barnier spoke in connection with the Committee's adoption of an opinion on "The structures and goals of European regional policy in the context of enlargement and globalisation", which followed on from the Second Cohesion Report adopted by the European Commission on 31 January. Commissioner Barnier's aim was to inform and to stimulate a discussion in which the members of the Committee of the Regions would play an active part.

He emphasised the enormous significance of the proposed enlargement to 27 member states. This would increase the total EU population by around one-third, but increase total EU GDP by only around 5%. And many current member-states have great internal inequalities. Cohesion policy must be given new meaning. Priorities must be established – these might be urban priorities and areas disadvantaged by nature or geography. Less-developed regions must get priority and per capita GDP must remain the criterion for eligibility. But the serious poverty of new states should not eclipse the serious difficulties of current member states. The entire territory of the Union must be considered. Cohesion policy should be supported by all for the benefit of all. The budget will have to be increased post-2006.

He promised to visit the regions represented in order to listen to their many views on the future shape of regional policy. He said that the Committee's members, along with local radio, television and newspapers, had a major role to play in counteracting the image of a "Brussels" which merely churns out incomprehensible directives.

The Committee of the Regions president, Jos Chabert, responded to the Commissioner's invitation by suggesting that a COR member from each region should accompany him on his visits, a proposal that the Commissioner accepted. He also reiterated his invitation to COR members to take part in the forum on cohesion to be held on 21 and 22 May 2001.

A presentation was made on the new CoR internet site.

In addition, opinions were adopted on the following subjects:

- the environment (control of hazardous substances, and of environmental noise; public access to environmental information);
- the importance of public credit institutions for the balanced development of Europe's regions, cities and localities;
- review of the internal market strategy;
- the control of classical swine fever;
- integrated coastal zone management in Europe.

Plenary session, 4/5 April 2001

Among the opinions and resolutions adopted was a Resolution on the next Intergovernmental Conference, in 2004, which concluded that the next reform of the European Union must be much more radical than that agreed at Nice. It said, "the Treaty of Nice falls well short of what the Committee has deemed necessary, in particular: strengthening the Union's ability to enlarge, enhancing its democratic legitimacy, transparency and closeness to the people, and lasting improvements to its decision making process".

The CoR reiterated its demand that it should be accorded full "Institution" status, with the right to institute proceedings in the European Court of Justice to safeguard its own rights. It insisted that it should be granted 'powers which go beyond a purely consultative role'. The resolution also called for a more precise delimitation of competences between the EU and member states, simplification of the Treaties and the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, root and branch reform of the Council of Ministers and the political role of the CoR.

The resolution supported the idea of a 'convention' including CoR representatives to prepare the "future European agenda"; and it proposed a 'general assembly' of the EU's regional and local authorities in mid-October 2001 to discuss the future of the EU and to set out 'demands', calling for a public debate to be opened by local and regional government.

Foot and mouth disease, and the farming crisis in general, was another major issue at this plenary session, and an emergency resolution was adopted by the members of the CoR, many of whom represent regions hit by the crisis.

The session also included a statement by the European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Pedro Solbes Mira, which highlighted the important role of local and regional authorities in preparing for the introduction of euro notes and coins in January 2002. He said the latest survey showed that one third of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were not even aware that they would need to use the euro for all transactions from 1 January. There was therefore a need to intensify efforts to inform everyone of the change. He suggested that public administrations across the eurozone should take a lead in this by starting to pay their employees' salaries and settle invoices in euros.

The Commissioner congratulated the CoR for the initiatives it had taken with regard to the euro: 75 representatives of local and regional authorities had attended a meeting to exchange information on best practice in the conversion process. The Commission and the CoR had also worked closely together to organise a very useful survey of the readiness of local and regional authorities for the changeover. This had shown that three quarters of them had staff training programmes underway, but the Commissioner was concerned that not enough was being done to plan changes to computer systems. CoR President, Jos Chabert, said: "The regional and local authorities will play a vital role in introducing the euro through the information they can provide to some 300 million Europeans".

Opinions and resolutions were adopted on:

- maritime safety, and nuclear safety
- Trans-European Networks
- the award of public transport contracts
- the Urban Audit final report
- co-ordination of civil protection in the event of emergencies
- review of the EU economy, and innovation in a knowledge-driven economy
- the outcome of the 2000 Intergovernmental Conference.

Commission 5

Commission 5 tracks the work of the European Commission in the areas of social policy, public health, consumer protection, research and tourism and prepares opinions which provide recommendations for official Communications and proposals made on these topics by the European Commission.

Consumer policy

CoR opinions in the consumer policy area examine issues related to consumer health protection and food safety in the European Union. Commission 5 looks at European Commission proposals for legislation to protect the consumer in the internal market and reinforce market transparency. It seeks to ensure that the interests of consumers are given due consideration in the development of other EU policies. Through the work of Commission 5, the CoR evaluates this work from the local and regional perspective.

Consumer Health protection

CoR efforts in the area of public health protection track the European Commission's proposals on topics such as: the creation, and management of European scientific committees concerned with consumer health; and inspections, to ensure that rules on hygiene and food safety in the food chain are respected.

Research and Technological Development

The primary work of Commission 5 in this area has been to closely follow developments in the European Commission regarding the creation and implementation of EU Framework

programmes for research and technological development (RTD), which aim to increase the competitiveness of European industry.

Tourism

Tourism has the potential to bring new revenue streams and economic growth to many regions in the European Union. CoR opinions on the subject - guided by the work of Commission 5 - make recommendations on topics such as rural tourism and business tourism. They stress how tourism can help to reduce unemployment in many cities and regions. Closely linked to this are the issues of training and professional development and the exchange of know-how and experiences between regions.

I have attended meetings of Commission 5 on 5 February, which discussed “food safety and the mad cow crisis”; and on 19 April, which discussed a number of issues including refugees, strategies for jobs in the information society and, again, BSE.

In general, I have sought to spread awareness of the Assembly and the new devolved political reality in the UK, while addressing issues of particular concern and relevance to Wales with the help of the Wales European Centre briefings.

I attend UK delegation meetings held prior to plenary sessions to discuss UK concerns and positions. And I work with Wales’ other members: my alternate, Elin Jones, and the WLGA members, Brian Smith and his alternate, Jonathan Huish.

I have put my name forward as a potential rapporteur. Rapporteurs act with an expert they choose to formulate opinions and resolutions their commission and to take those opinions and resolutions through plenary for adoption. Rapporteurs become much more closely involved in the work of the CoR and considerably raise their profiles and those of the bodies they represent.

Much discussion has taken place on how the CoR should develop and grow to increase its role, influence and power. This has occurred in the context of enlargement and proposed structural change. There is considerable frustration with its current, purely advisory role and perceived lack of real power.

At the 23 May meeting of the Assembly’s European Affairs Committee, I requested a paper from officials as to how the Assembly might best use its membership of the CoR. This should facilitate committee discussion on the most productive approach to our membership and the opportunities it provides for the Assembly and the people of Wales.