



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations: Overview of 1 July - 31 December 2020 18 February 2021 Reference: SPCB(2021)Paper 13

Executive summary

1. The International Strategy agreed by the SPCB in January 2017 stated that the International Relations Office (IRO) would produce a twice-yearly overview of the core international work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. This paper covers the period 1 July - 31 December 2020. No decision is being sought by the SPCB.

Governance

2. The IRO is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy. While it facilitates most inward and outward international visits, it is not involved in every visit to or from the Parliament e.g. those undertaken by committees as part of an inquiry or by MSPs on cross party groups. This paper therefore does not reflect all the Parliament's international activity, only that supported by the IRO.

3. The current International Strategy built on the experiences and practices applied by the Parliament in developing its international relations approach. The continued link of the Strategy to the Parliament's Strategic and Delivery plans allows the IRO to better plan activity (now virtual), which in turn provides a more efficient linking to resources. In short, the Parliament can more easily identify what it wants to do, why, and when.

Issues and options

4. Annexed is an infographic showing virtual activity in the period of this report and the discussion topics.

5. In March 2020, all planned inward and outward international visits were cancelled by the IRO. This remains the position. As reported to the SPCB in the last activity report in October, the IRO has continued to arrange virtual discussions for the Presiding Officers and Members with other legislatures and organisations with which the Parliament has prioritised strengthening relations. These were:

- Presiding Officer and Dr Gabrielle Andretta MdL, President of the State Parliament of Lower Saxony on the role of a parliament education centre
- Presiding Officer hosted a Festival of Politics panel discussion involving the International Labour Organisation on the impact of COVID on the future of work
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Roger Torrent, President of the Parliament of Catalonia, on the Young Women Lead programme (this discussion was on the back of a virtual meeting which the DPO attended, organised by the Parliament of Catalonia, on gender parliaments)
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Elin Jones MS, Llywydd of the Welsh Parliament, on the Young Women Lead programme
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Katia Segers, Member of the Flemish Parliament and the Belgian Senate, on the Young Women Lead programme

6. A key benefit from this focus on developing such direct friendships and relationships has allowed the IRO to quickly and easily approach others interested in the same or similar issues. The Presiding Officers, through these discussions, were able to share experiences and knowledge on the parliamentary response to COVID-19 as well as more 'corporate' matters. These are practical examples of how the SPCB's focus on 'interparliamentary co-operations' can work.

7. Some other virtual engagements during the report period are highlighted below:

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Members of the Scotland Branch Executive Committee participated in the regional conference
- Margaret Mitchell MSP and Claire Baker MSP participated in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians regional meeting and discussion on COVID and violence against women and girls

Other activities

- Gillian Martin MSP, Convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, participated in the Arctic Circle Q&A session on environment, climate change and energy
- Angela Constance MSP participated in the two EU's Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group meetings on post Brexit relationships
- Scottish Parliament Information Centre researchers participation in a US House Democracy Partnership web seminar on parliamentary research service
- Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani MSP) participated in the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Steering Committee

Resource implications

8. There are no resource implications arising from this paper. All activity was accommodated from within the IRO budget.

Publication scheme

9. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

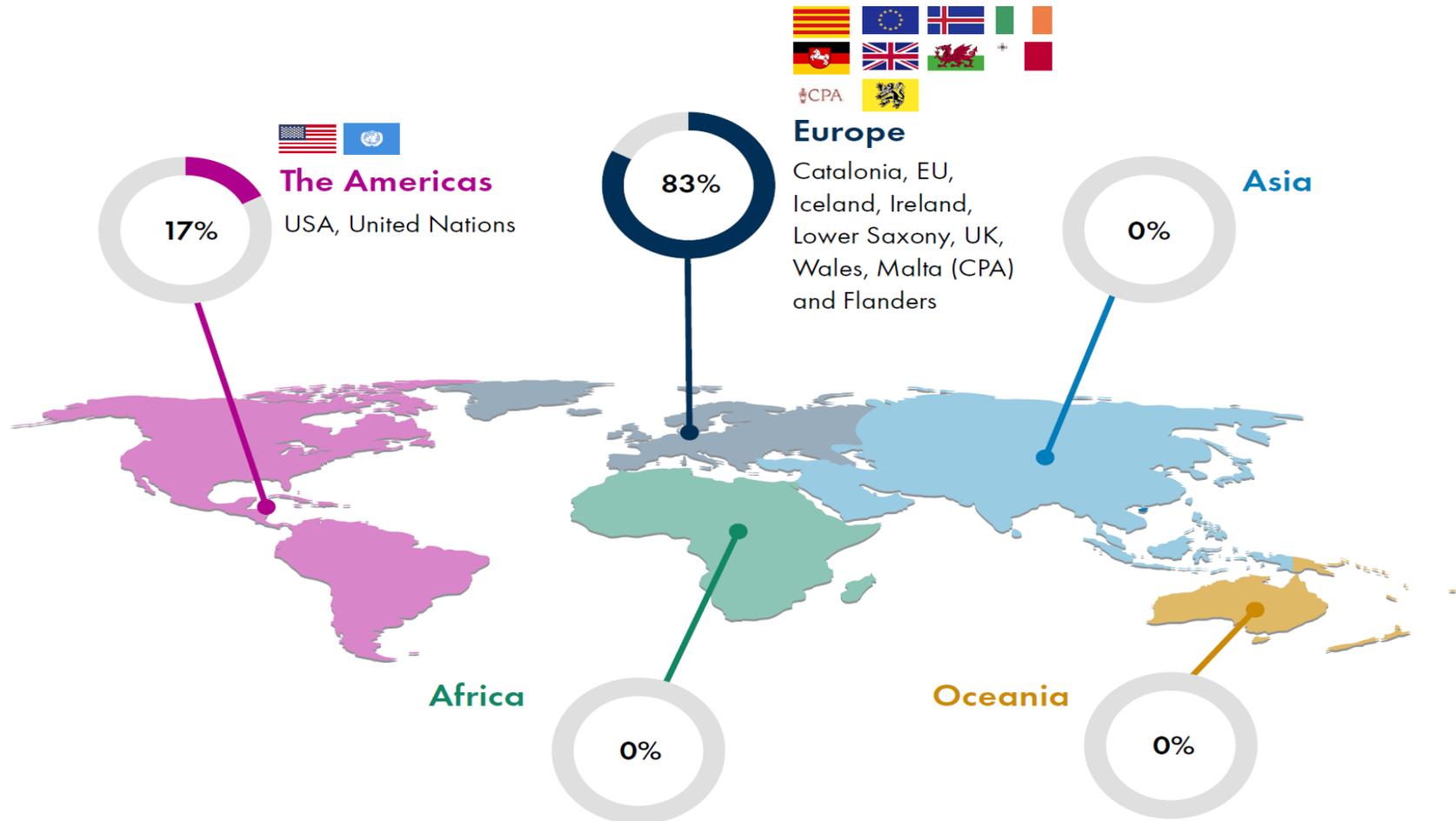
Decision

10. The SPCB is invited to note the activity undertaken across the second six months of 2020.

International Relations Office

February 2021

International Activity: 1 July to 31 December 2020



Designations

International Organisation



President/Presiding Officer/Speaker



Parliamentarians



Parliament officials



Consul General



Discussion topic

