



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 3 September 2015

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
13th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

*Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dr Fabian Zuleeg (European Policy Centre)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 3 September 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

European Union (Update)

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning and welcome to the 13th meeting in 2015 of the European and External Relations Committee. We have received apologies from our colleague Jamie McGrigor. I make the usual request that mobile phones and other electronic devices be switched off or to silent.

We go straight to agenda item 1. I welcome to the committee via videolink—although he has visited us before—Dr Fabian Zuleeg, who is chief executive of the European Policy Centre in Brussels.

Dr Fabian Zuleeg (European Policy Centre): Good morning.

The Convener: Dr Zuleeg will speak to us on a number of areas of interest and give us an update on what is happening across the European Union. I believe that he wants to make an opening statement to update us on some of the developments.

Dr Zuleeg: Yes, convener. I will keep it quite brief to give you a chance to ask questions. I will give a general overview of the things that have been happening over the summer and are continuing to happen now. I will briefly cover four big blocks: the Greek crisis and what that entails; the migration crisis that we are facing; where we are on the debate on reforms in connection with the UK referendum; and the on-going work at the EU level in areas such as better regulation and single markets—the more day-to-day work of the EU.

I will start with the Greek crisis. We had high drama from the beginning of the year until the summer with the new Government in Greece rejecting the approach that had been taken so far but at the same time needing additional support to stay within the euro. We really were in a situation where it was going to the wire, and it could have gone wrong: we were close to a potential Grexit at times. In my view, that would have been a disaster for Greece. The economy in Greece could not have taken the shock of a sudden Grexit at this point. It would have had to default and to start an alternative currency of some kind, which would have been worthless from the start.

I think that the economic and social situation in Greece would have deteriorated even further, with massive capital flight, migration and even instability within the country, and that would also have had a big impact on the rest of the EU. I deliberately said “the rest of the EU” rather than “the eurozone” because the political fallout from a sudden catastrophic exit from the euro by Greece would have been significant especially in the medium to longer term. The immediate consequences of a Grexit could have been handled, although more money would have had to be found, particularly to help the Greek population, but the real story is about the longer-term purpose of the European integration process. If we give up on a country, the signal that we give is that the European integration process is not working in the way that it should, and that would also have had implications for other countries.

In the end, a compromise was found. In my view, it is heavily weighted in favour of the demands that were coming from the EU side—from the eurozone side in particular—rather than from the Greek side. There were some concessions, but they have been relatively small. Politically, however, the Greek side saw no choice but to implement it, with the consequence that parts of the governing party Syriza have been splitting up in opposition to the deal and there will be new elections with an uncertain outcome.

My overall expectation is that we will get a stable Government in Greece, at least for the time being, that the package will be agreed to and that we will then have some time to implement the package. However, in the medium term, we have to be aware that for political reasons—especially in some of the large donor countries such as Germany—it will be extremely difficult if there has to be another package. This is the last package that Greece can hope for and there need to be real reforms on the ground to deliver it. Greece, in my view, cannot come back and ask for further support.

I will move on to the migration crisis. We were already facing quite a significant crisis, driven predominantly by the conflicts in places such as Syria and Iraq, which have spilled over into countries such as Lebanon, as well as the conflicts in north Africa, in places such as Libya. The major factor that is driving the crisis are the push factors of those conflicts rather than any of the pull factors, although we also have to recognise that it is not just refugees from those countries who are on the move at the moment—economic migrants are also on the move. We still have a mobility issue within the European Union as well.

The big numbers at the moment are the refugees from those war areas, and it is proving impossible to stop the flow of refugees. Even in

those countries that are trying to stop the flow, the push factors are simply too strong. Building fences and trying to stop people from getting on trains is temporary. It just turns particular places into refugee camps; it does nothing to stop the flow of refugees coming.

There is a clear need to find a better way of dealing with the situation—for humanitarian reasons as well. We need to find routes whereby we can share the burden within the EU. The numbers going to particular countries are immense. We are talking about 800,000 refugees potentially going to Germany in one year alone. That represents 1 per cent of the population in a single year, which is a massive inflow of refugees. In some of the smaller countries, we are potentially talking about proportionately even higher inflows. We need to deal with that, but we are currently failing to deal with it at the European level.

We have had some agreements—for example, to put more money into Frontex, which is the EU border agency. There have been some discussions about a voluntary system of quotas whereby countries take in particular numbers, but frankly that is a drop in the ocean given the situation that we are facing.

Clearly, this crisis will continue to dominate the agenda for the coming months. There will be further discussions, but whether there will be a decisive coming together of the European member states to deal jointly with this classic pan-European problem remains to be seen. I am not particularly hopeful about that given the domestic political situation in a number of places.

Between the Greek crisis and the migration crisis, the question of the UK referendum, although it has not quite been pushed off the agenda completely, has certainly not featured very highly on the agenda. Some talks are going on about the potential reform package that might be put in place but, at the moment, the focus is very much on the other crises that I mentioned.

There is an expectation that the referendum might happen quite quickly rather than later, even in the first half of 2016, which means that some reform package—or at least its corner points—would need to be agreed by December. I think that we have to watch this space; we know that some of the key issues on the table include free movement, the eurozone versus the non-eurozone, and some of the symbolism around European integration. However, it remains to be seen whether anything concrete can be put on the table, particularly given the short timeframe that I have just outlined.

Finally, I should briefly highlight some of the European Union's day-to-day areas of work. In

particular, Vice-President Timmermans has put forward a package on better regulation that proposes certain changes to the working of the legislative and evidence-based policy processes at European level, and we also await the Commission's proposals for enhancing integration in the single market, which will probably come sometime in October. Those are the day-to-day matters that are being dealt with; the danger is that they are the sorts of things that are pushed off the agenda by the big crises, but they are important to the development of the European Union.

The Convener: Thank you very much for giving us your very comprehensive and detailed understanding of EU topics that, although very different, are in some cases fundamentally linked through processes.

You have mentioned the challenges in Greece, the refugee crisis and EU reform, all of which are, I think, linked; indeed, I read this morning a suggestion by one of your German colleagues that David Cameron should not have any discussions about EU reform—and, indeed, that they will not facilitate such discussions—unless he takes a fair share of responsibility for the refugee crisis that we are seeing on the front page of all of our newspapers. Greece, especially some of its islands such as Kos, is sharing some of that burden.

Can you give us some insight into what you think EU member states should be doing? The clarion call that we have been hearing reached a crescendo overnight with some of the images that we have all been confronted with, which means that we have seen the hard reality for people who are fleeing oppression and war. That clarion call is coming from the general public, who are pushing our politicians, but do you have any ideas about what more the EU should be doing? Has Frontex been as effective as *mare nostrum*, which was the previous programme for rescuing people in the Mediterranean?

I am just going to chuck all those things at you now in the hope that you will be able to make some sense of them and come back to me with some ideas that we in this place can push at our politicians.

Dr Zuleeg: The recent developments and the very dramatic and sad pictures that we have seen in the past couple of days have really highlighted the human cost of the crisis. This should be a wake-up call for all of us, not just politicians, with regard to our responsibilities. This is a societal issue, and we must accept that most societies in Europe will have a significant influx of these refugees who are fleeing for their lives and are willing to risk their lives to get away from the horrendous conflict in their home countries.

09:15

We should be taking refugees. We have to get used to the idea that unless the conflict is resolved, which does not look likely until at least the medium term, we must think about how we integrate refugees into our societies and labour markets, because they are not going to go away quickly. The worst situation would be to end up with large numbers of refugees who are living in—I use this word deliberately—slums and unable to go anywhere. Therefore, we must make sure that Europe takes its responsibilities seriously.

The difficulty is that this is not the first time that we have been here. Perhaps the crisis has changed a little but, if we look back to the Lampedusa tragedy, a lot of the same rhetoric was used at that time. It remains to be seen whether populations are pushing politicians further. I do not know exactly what will happen, but it must be said that, every time we have been faced with such pictures, there has been an outcry that, after a while, has died down. The difficulty is that we are talking about immense numbers of people, and that presents a huge challenge. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that, unless the conflict is in some way resolved, the numbers will be fewer next year or the year after. Therefore, we have to deal with the situation as an on-going challenge, which is difficult.

Despite this very much being a pan-European challenge, the problem is that the instruments that we have at European level to deal with the challenge are limited. The instruments are predominately at member state level. There are some implications at European level because of, for example, the Schengen agreement, which makes it more difficult for some countries to manage the refugee issue. Overall, the policy very strongly lies with member states' responsibilities. The situation will remain difficult unless member states are willing to accept their responsibilities and to come together and have meaningful agreement at European level. If we continue to talk about redistributing 40,000 refugees in the face of a single country having 800,000, we are falling way short of where we need to be. In the end, it comes down to a domestically tricky question in a number of member states where, politically, the leaders do not think that they can accept more refugees.

The Convener: The sum total of the number of refugees taken in by the UK as a result of the Syria crisis is 227. I think that we can do much better than that; I agree whole-heartedly with you on that.

An interesting aspect that I have seen over the past few days is the situation in Hungary. The Government there was saying that it is following the Schengen agreement but that there is intense

cost and pressure in doing so. It has had to allow people to get on trains and move across the borders to other European countries.

You mentioned that some of the instruments at EU level are maybe not that helpful and that the main responsibilities lie at member state level. I am aware that there has been a conversation about a Europe-wide immigration policy. I hate to conflate immigration with a refugee crisis, because that is something that I believe the media and politicians have deliberately done in order to downplay what is happening in the Mediterranean, but do we need new and updated Europe-wide policies on refugee status and immigration that all member states must buy into? Would that be a worthwhile exploration? I certainly think that it would be a worthwhile challenge.

Dr Zuleeg: When we are faced with a situation like the refugee crisis, it is clearly a pan-European challenge. We are seeing what happens if we try to deal with that country by country—it simply does not work. There is no way that we can effectively do that. However, the member states coming together in a truly common asylum policy is very far off. I do not see the political will to make that happen.

The best that we can hope for at the moment is to tackle particular elements—for example, to agree a more meaningful distribution quota for some of the refugees, to provide more assistance to the main transit countries and to deal with some of the issues around the Dublin agreement under which refugees should be sent back to the first EU country they enter. Those are the kind of issues that we need to tackle, but a number of member states, of which the UK is potentially one, will block any meaningful move in that direction. Therefore, in a lot of ways we are stuck.

The other issue—again, I am not hopeful that we are going to address it—is that we should be having a real think at the European level about the causes of the refugee crisis and tackling some of the issues around foreign policy, trade and the promotion of human rights in other countries, as well as security and the conflict that we are seeing. At the moment, there is no great political will to do that jointly.

Finally, I emphasise that we need to differentiate a bit more when we talk about the crisis. I fully agree with you that things are getting conflated very easily, such as the mobility issue, the refugee issue and the economic migration issue. There is a big difference between the refugee issue—in my view, we have an absolute obligation, as rich countries that uphold human rights, to take the refugees, who are in fear of their lives—and the economic migration issue. We should have a sensible route for economic migration into the European Union, but we do not have that at the

moment. By and large, it comes down to what member states want to do and not what the European Union might want to do.

The Convener: Thank you. That has been very helpful.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Good morning, Dr Zuleeg. Surely to goodness there is a right to life. Many of my constituents who are talking to me about the crisis are horrified at the squabbling that is going on about who will take what number of refugees from the Mediterranean while thousands of people, including children, are dying and are drowning in the sea. Surely to goodness it is time for our European leaders to step up to the mark, forget the squabbling and begin to save lives. Is there no view in Europe that that is the priority?

Dr Zuleeg: I fully agree with you. What some of the leaders are saying is sometimes shameful. In some countries, there is a narrow focus on electoral gain. However, the debate is changing and we can hear different voices in a number of countries, such as Germany.

How the refugees have been received in Germany over the past few weeks has been phenomenal to see. They have been welcomed with open arms, and the citizens have provided help and support. We should see that kind of picture across Europe, but the reality is that, in a lot of countries, other considerations are still overriding that and there is almost a feeling of helplessness. Because the numbers are so big and the challenge is so great, there is a helplessness and people do not know what they can do without attracting even more refugees to follow such a route.

Willie Coffey: Can you tell us anything about who is deploying rescue ships in the Mediterranean? I know, for example, that the Irish Naval Service has a tiny boat called the LÉ Niamh operating in the Mediterranean, which has rescued 2,500 people over the past two months. Is there any data on what other member states' navies are doing in the Mediterranean and on how many people they are rescuing? The last thing I read about the British Government was that it had withdrawn its frigate, HMS Bulwark, from that duty. I do not know whether it has replaced that with anything. Do you have any information on that?

Dr Zuleeg: I am sorry—I do not have detailed information on that. I know that there has been activity in the Mediterranean and that there has been more investment in Frontex to address that, but I do not have the details at the moment.

Willie Coffey: I will let other colleagues come in now.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I will follow up my colleague Willie Coffey's line of questioning. Europe does not appear to be up to the job of establishing a quota system. Do we have a quota system to hand, as it were, so that we can tell countries that their share is X amount of the overall influx of migrants? If the public had that information, it might help to put pressure on politicians to do something about taking that level of people into their countries. Should such factual information be distributed to the citizens of Europe?

Dr Zuleeg: It would be helpful to have a real quota system at the European level, although it is quite complex to establish, as a number of factors need to be taken into account, such as the capacity of the country, its wealth and whether it can deal with a large number of people. We know that certain countries are struggling not just because of the absolute numbers but because of the systems that are in place. There is the question of how many refugees countries have already taken and whether a new burden should be added to that.

We should not forget the strong push factors from the refugees. If we ask them where they want to go, they predominantly name a few countries, but not other countries, around the European Union.

In the end, such a quota system has to be negotiated at the European level. There has to be give and take. Some countries are willing to take a bit more, and some countries are willing to take fewer but, at least at the moment, certain countries are refusing to accept that there should be a mandatory quota system at the European level.

Unless the system is mandatory, it will be meaningless. That is what we have seen over the past few months. If we continue to tell countries that it is a voluntary system under which they can take some people, or maybe not, some countries will continue to take virtually none of the refugees.

In the end, it comes down to the political will of the member states to accept such a quota system. At the last summit that we had, at least, the countries clearly had no political will to do that.

Adam Ingram: So you are saying that the European institutions are not up to the job of tackling the crisis.

Dr Zuleeg: No, I am not stating that the European institutions are not up to the job. This is not down to the European institutions; it is down to the member states, which have decided that Europe does not have certain competences. The European institutions cannot override that, as they are bound by the treaties and by European law to focus on the areas where they have competence. The only thing that they can do in the areas where

they do not have competence is admonish and try to convince the member states to change their stance, but the institutions do not have the legal means to do that.

09:30

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I agree with the comments of my colleague Willie Coffey when he started his line of questioning.

I have a couple of questions on the Dublin accord. How do you see that panning out in this situation? Will it be an obstacle or will it be accepted that it has limited practical value in the current situation?

Dr Zuleeg: That will be discussed at the next summit, which will cover how far we can meaningfully enforce the idea of sending people back to their first entry point. What we are seeing in Germany clearly indicates that Germany has no intention of enforcing that, but other countries intend to do it because they do not want to take more refugees in the current crisis.

We need to consider more than just the immediate short term and not to focus only on what happens in just the next month or two, because we are talking about on-going flows of refugees of the present size for at least a number of months to come. It is clear that the desperation of the people who are moving is so great that they will continue to try to get into their final destination country whether it is part of Schengen or not. We can see that happening with those who are trying to get to the UK.

There is therefore limited use of the idea of sending people back or sending them to safe countries outside the European Union. Even if we tried to do that, I do not see how we could logistically do it if we continued to have the current large numbers of refugees.

Roderick Campbell: On a slightly different point, I do not know the full details of what the UK Government is trying to renegotiate as part of its reform package, but all the indications are that the question of economic migrants and benefits for them is a substantial part of it. Will the background of the refugee crisis inevitably impact on those negotiations and possibly make the UK Government look rather shallow in its reform agenda and undermine its whole position?

Dr Zuleeg: First, I want to clearly distinguish economic migrants from outside the European Union from EU citizens who exercise their right to move within the EU—those are fundamentally two different issues. If we are talking about economic migrants from outside the EU, my view is that we should have a more rational policy but that, in essence, that is a competence of not the EU but

individual member states. There can be agreement on the issue at the European level, but that is unlikely at the moment.

When it comes to people exercising their right to mobility within the EU, the reality is that a number of mechanisms are in place to stop the abuse of free movement, which can include a number of social security provisions. However, in that context, we see little evidence anywhere of social security abuse or welfare tourism. Those terms are used at the political level, but the evidence for such practices is slight. There is evidence, though, to show that the free movement of people within the EU has greatly benefited the countries that have received them.

It is important to recognise that the mobility provision is non-negotiable. The fundamental principle of free movement is not only part of the European single market—in the debate, it is often forgotten that the single market entails the free movement of workers—but a fundamental treaty right that will not be weakened in any negotiation. Therefore, we have to look at a more realistic approach, which entails dealing with abuse when evidence for it is found.

We should not touch the free movement right, which is one of the EU's great achievements and is economically essential for the EU. If we started to water down such rights, we would undermine the EU's fundamental principles.

Roderick Campbell: Where do you foresee the ultimate negotiated position going? What will the UK Government be offered?

Dr Zuleeg: Even if there was a will, which I do not think that there is, there is no way that the fundamental principle would be changed. Therefore, we are talking about potentially re-emphasising mechanisms to prevent abuse and reiterating that the right is there for people to seek jobs and not benefits in other EU countries. The big danger is that, if something such as a call for a quota for EU citizens comes up in the negotiation, we will quickly reach an impasse, because certain things—of which a quota is one—are impossible under European law.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning, Dr Zuleeg. When you mentioned looking at the solutions to some of the problems, you emphasised the promotion of the human rights aspect. Have any of the programmes related to that been accelerated? Is there scope for that to happen quickly?

Dr Zuleeg: There has been some action. Since the last European summit, more money has gone to some of the affected countries and to Frontex. How quickly that will translate into action on the ground depends on the member state's capacity. In the end, their systems can be supported—in

some cases, that may even include personnel. For example, we have border patrols from different countries helping out at the main transit points. Fundamentally, we are talking about member states' capacity to deal with the situation, especially with such numbers. When we look at the situation in parts of Hungary and on the islands on the Greek-Turkish border, for example, we see that we are reaching points where, given the sheer logistics, the difficulties in dealing with such numbers in a constrained space and with constrained means are starting to show and to have a very detrimental impact on the refugees' wellbeing.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning, Dr Zuleeg. You made a very interesting comment about the cause of the refugee influx that we face in Europe. The common denominator is that the vast majority of refugees are from Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, which are countries where, historically, British forces have been heavily involved. We are involved in Syria, despite the United Nations saying not to get involved—I feel that the UK Government has a moral obligation to be involved.

I am quite comfortable with some European countries saying that they do not want to accept refugees, because they were not involved in causing the refugee situation. Those countries feel as if they are almost being penalised simply because they are European, even though they have not been involved in the European theatre of conflict, as one could perhaps call it.

I think that David Cameron has a moral obligation to help to address the issue in more than one way. We need to address the cause of the influx, and it is important that we do so fairly quickly. In addition, we must try to find a home, particularly for the women and children affected. All of us are sensitive to their plight; we tend to overlook the young men who are fit and will fight and survive. It is important that we deal with the vulnerable community. When the children grow up, they will remember what happened to them, why it happened to them and how they were treated. I do not want those young Europeans growing up thinking that they are different from indigenous Europeans. We want them to be part and parcel of Europe, because we do not want headaches in another 20 years' time. Such issues are worthy of serious consideration. We do not want those young people to feel that they are part of a them-and-us society as they grow up in our communities.

The European Union will have to deal with the situation somehow fairly quickly, and the countries that were involved in causing it in the first place need to be called to account and asked to deal with the fallout from their actions in the parts of the

world concerned. Is that partly why some of the European countries are refusing to take in refugees, or am I barking up the wrong tree?

Dr Zuleeg: I think that the question of responsibility has to be discussed in a domestic context. I do not feel that the EU has a role to play in allocating responsibility to member states. Some of the countries that are refusing to accept refugees have been involved in some, if not all, of the international action. It is a complex picture that it is not easy to analyse.

It is not only a question of having direct responsibility for the situation. The reality is that we created the EU with the explicit purpose of dealing with pan-European challenges—the kind of situations that individual countries cannot deal with effectively. For me, the refugee crisis is a clear example of a pan-European issue on which we should be working together. In my view, that is the purpose of the EU. As with every European action, it is a case not just of receiving benefits and support from the European level, but of taking responsibility and showing solidarity with those countries that are affected negatively by the issue in question.

Since the central and eastern European countries came into the EU, we have made large amounts of money available to help them to develop their economies. We could have turned around and said, "It's not our problem that the economies in central and eastern Europe are less developed," but, in my view, helping out in that way is part of a common European objective of working together to deal with problems jointly rather than leaving individual countries to deal with them by themselves.

09:45

Hanzala Malik: Surely that is different. I am talking about what happens if a member of an organisation such as the European Union decides to act like a rogue state. If the United Nations says not to get involved in Syria and the British get involved through bombing sites in Syria, we will be going against the UN. We in Europe should not have to pick up the baggage from one rogue state's actions, surely. Going in and doing something that is totally against the European Union's ethos is different from helping European Union countries to come up to the mark. The European Union did not decide to go into Syria, but the British Government did. If it has gone into Syria and caused all these problems, surely to God it has a moral responsibility to pick up the tab.

Dr Zuleeg: I am not denying that you have to have a debate at the UK domestic level to allocate responsibility. For me, that is not really a

European debate; it is about what needs to be done within the UK.

Hanzala Malik: Thank you.

The Convener: Are there any more questions?

Adam Ingram: There are many others but I do not think that we have time.

The Convener: Dr Zuleeg, you will have realised this morning that one topic is dominating the agenda for very good reasons. You have helped us to understand some aspects of it.

There is an extraordinary meeting of the justice and home affairs council on 14 September, although I do not know whether David Cameron or Theresa May will go to it. Perhaps this committee should raise some of our concerns with the UK Government so that when its representative goes to the meeting, our voice might have influenced a change in policy and direction, especially on the immediate crisis but also, I would hope, on our long-term aims. Will other member states take that view?

Dr Zuleeg: A number of member states will argue that this is the time for a real European response to the crisis. That will be driven partially by the pressure that is on some of those states. At the moment, the most pressure is on the entry points where the refugees are coming in and then the pressure will be on the countries where they want to go, particularly Germany but also Austria and so on.

Those countries will push more for a European response but it remains to be seen how far countries that are not so directly affected at the moment, or which believe that they can control the flow of refugees, are willing to enter the debate. At the moment, I am not particularly hopeful that we will see a lot coming out of that extraordinary council meeting.

The Convener: For some of us, hope is all that we have. The UK has a long and honourable history on the issue. If we look back to the late 19th century and the early 20th century and the Irish situation or the first and second world wars, we see that we opened our arms and homes to people. The current situation is not that different and we should do some more of that. This committee should be adding its voice to those calls.

I thank Dr Zuleeg for coming along this morning. Are members happy for the committee to do some more work on the issue and perhaps put our concerns in writing to the United Kingdom Government?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Dr Zuleeg, it is always a pleasure to have you at the committee—we could

talk for hours about the knowledge and information that you can share with us. We hope to see you back at committee; we would like to get you here in the flesh, although we really appreciate you coming to us this morning via videoconference. We also appreciate the understanding that you have given the committee. Thank you very much.

Dr Zuleeg: Thank you.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

09:49

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is one of our on-going interests: the transatlantic trade and investment partnership. We have quite a comprehensive paper from the Scottish Parliament information centre and a letter from Francis Maude. I think that the letter is quite confused, so I will take questions from members for clarification.

Roderick Campbell: TTIP is obviously a moveable feast, and there are a couple of things on which I would like to get further clarification. First, have we had an update on a possible meeting with Cecilia Malmström?

The Convener: The clerk has just reminded me that nothing has been organised yet, but the committee will go to Strasbourg with the specific topic in mind.

Roderick Campbell: My memory may be playing tricks on me, but I thought that there had been a letter not proposing something definite but giving an indication that there may be dialogue.

The Convener: There was a commitment potentially to meet the Scottish Government, and we were hoping to tie into that. However, I do not think that there has been a lot of progress on that over the summer. Maybe we will chase the Government and see where it is with its plans. The committee will then be able to exploit that opportunity when it comes along.

Roderick Campbell: Secondly, we will want to discuss with members of the European Parliament any discussions that they have had on the issue. Has there been any update on that?

The Convener: There are plans for that in the work programme, which we will discuss later. We have a potential date to meet MEPs in November, which is not far off.

Roderick Campbell: The negotiations are on-going, and the committee has done a considerable amount of work on the issue already but there are some issues still to be addressed, not the least of which is the continuing debate on the economic benefits of TTIP, which are referred to in the House of Commons briefing paper from the beginning of July. The committee might consider doing some further work on that. When negotiations are on-going, it is always difficult to decide at what point it would be appropriate to review them. However, we have embarked on detailed consideration of TTIP and, before the committee ceases to be at the end of the current

session, we ought to factor in some further work on that.

The Convener: We have built some work with MEPs into the work programme. We understand that the issue is not going away. The letter from Francis Maude suggests that he would be happy to provide updates to the committee on any developments, but Lord Livingston—*[Interruption.]*—sorry, David Lidington, who is the Minister of State for Europe, has decided not to come to the committee. In the letter, there seems to be a misunderstanding about who the Scottish Parliament is and who the Scottish Government is; there seems to be no understanding that they are two different entities.

Roderick Campbell: I also have a request to make. SPICe has put together a comprehensive document. I suggest that we ask for regular updates from SPICe so that we can keep the matter to the forefront of our activities.

The Convener: I suspect that, when the MEPs go back into session, TTIP will be a hot topic. I also suspect that the US will want to get the negotiations concluded before the next US elections, so there may be some impetus and further opportunities. We have a discussion with MEPs scheduled for November to allow us to continue our work on TTIP, so it is not off the agenda by any stretch of the imagination. Your good work in keeping the committee focused on the issue will also mean that it will not be off the agenda.

Does anyone else have any questions or comments on TTIP?

Adam Ingram: Rod Campbell mentioned the economic impact. If I recall rightly, when Scottish Government officials were in front of us some time ago, they indicated that they had not done an extensive amount of work on that issue. I would like us to check what work has been done on that to see what the practical implications might be for businesses in Scotland.

The Convener: Positive or negative implications.

Adam Ingram: Yes.

Roderick Campbell: By way of clarification, I lodged a parliamentary question on the issue on 24 August and have not yet had a response.

The Convener: Is there anything else on TTIP? I thank Iain McIver from SPICe for the update. There is probably nothing about TTIP that he does not know now.

“Brussels Bulletin”

09:56

The Convener: We move on to the “Brussels Bulletin”, which is jam-packed with stuff. Although Parliaments may not have been sitting over the summer, a lot of work has certainly been going on. Are there any comments, questions, clarifications or queries?

Adam Ingram: I have noted two or three issues. What are the implications of Glasgow being awarded the label of European entrepreneurial region? Can we get a little bit more information on that, please?

The huge response from European citizens on nature legislation is worthy of our attention. What are the implications of the issue for Scotland? A fitness check is mentioned. We should follow through on that, given the importance of wild areas of Scotland.

I also note that an extraordinary meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place next week,

“with discussions focusing on the economic situation in the dairy and livestock sectors.”

That is a live issue in my constituency as lots of dairy farmers are in crisis because of issues with milk prices and so on. I would also like more follow-up on that issue.

The Convener: Yes, we can do that.

Roderick Campbell: I noticed the reference to the stakeholder event that was held on 29 June on unconventional hydrocarbons and the suggestion that

“The Commission is reviewing non-binding guidelines on environmental protections for fracking and will decide before the end of 2015 on whether further measures are required.”

It would be helpful if someone could keep an eye on what is happening with that and report back, as it is an issue of considerable interest to constituents in most parts of Scotland.

The Convener: Hear, hear.

Willie Coffey: I support Adam Ingram’s comments on milk prices. Not only in Scotland and the UK but throughout Europe, farmers are clearly struggling very badly at the moment because of the price instability. It is really affecting the industry and the situation is serious. The bulletin states:

“The Commission announced market measures for fruit and vegetables and milk to mitigate pressure on prices”.

That is the usual Eurobabble. Can we have a briefing on what that might mean and how it might

assist Scottish farmers who produce milk? There is obviously also a role for the Scottish and UK Governments to play. Many farmers feel that they are at the mercy of supermarkets, which are pricing the commodity at even less than the cost of water, which is ridiculous. Any further help and information that the clerks could bring to assist the farming community in our constituencies would be appreciated.

Adam Ingram: There is the ban that has been imposed by Russia as well as the collapse in the Chinese trade in this area, so there are international forces at work here. We need to get a bit of a handle on the situation and work out what can be done to help our farmers.

The Convener: In some areas, there is an overproduction, which also drives down prices across Europe. I agree that we should look into that.

On the back page of the bulletin, there is information on horizon 2020, which the committee has always had an interest in. Members will see that there is quite a lot of detail there. I just want to raise awareness about that and to ensure that our colleagues in the Education and Culture Committee see some of the work that has been done. We learn that

“36,732 eligible proposals were submitted to the first 100 calls”

under horizon 2020. That is pretty good and it compares well with the previous situation. I have been speaking to a few people over the past few weeks who are innovators or educators at universities and they have been talking about how they are using horizon 2020, so it is there and it is working away. I want to make sure that we specifically refer the Education and Culture Committee to that point.

Are members happy to share the “Brussels Bulletin” with all our colleagues in other committees to raise awareness?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We should also raise awareness of the milk situation with the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee because I know that it is doing specific work on that.

10:01

Meeting continued in private until 10:41.

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