

# **EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 30 March 2004  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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## EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

### 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2004, Session 2

#### CONVENER

\*Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)

\*Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)

\*Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)

\*Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

\*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)

\*Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*attended

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

#### ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 3



## Scottish Parliament

### European and External Relations Committee

*Tuesday 30 March 2004*

*(Afternoon)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

### Low-cost Carriers (European Commission Decision)

**The Convener (Richard Lochhead):** Good afternoon everyone. A couple of members have still to arrive, but we will kick off.

We have one apology, from Irene Oldfather. As far as we are aware, no substitute has been arranged. I understand that the members who have not arrived will arrive later.

The first item on the agenda is the inquiry into the decision of the European Commission in the case of Ryanair and Charleroi airport. Members will recall that we asked Phil Gallie to be a reporter on the issue and to bring back his initial proposals for taking forward the inquiry. We have a brief outline of Phil's proposals in our papers. I ask him to say a few words about them.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** I would be grateful for the opportunity to carry out the inquiry. First, no costs are involved, other than some minor charges that might be made on my member's allowances. I have suggested that I should sound out Ryanair and others on the effect that the decision will have on them and on airports and come back to the committee with an outline of the situation as they see it.

**The Convener:** Thank you for putting together your proposal and for bringing it to the committee. Are there any comments?

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Sorry for being late, convener. I read through Phil Gallie's paper and it seems fine. I may be wrong, but I think that phase 2 should come before phase 1. We seem to be going from the specific to the general, rather than from the general to the specific. I would like the history and development of the relevant European Union regulations to be put at the top, because that is the benchmark. We should then examine not just the operation of new route support schemes, but existing routes.

**The Convener:** Are there any further comments?

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** I endorse that, because those points crossed my mind when I read the paper.

**The Convener:** Are you happy to take that on board, Phil?

**Phil Gallie:** To explain, a heck of a lot more work is involved in phase 2 than in phase 1. There will be a lot more contacts, and some costs might be involved. If nothing comes of phase 1 and committee members decide that we have enough information and it is not worth taking forward the inquiry, at that point it could be dropped without expenses having been incurred. Phase 1 will not involve much time, but phase 2 will. By phasing the stages in that way, I intended to give the committee the ability to choose how far it wants to go with the inquiry.

**Mr Raffan:** The first two activities of phase 2 are required, because they are necessary to set the scene. I am ignorant of the whole area. We cannot deal with specifics and details in a vacuum. Those activities—and certainly the first one—will not involve expense or much work.

**Phil Gallie:** I accept that.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** I commend Phil for his enthusiasm and enterprise. The issue is of particular interest to Ayrshire members, because of the Prestwick interest. I urge Phil to liaise closely with Irene Oldfather.

**Phil Gallie:** I will do. I accept Keith Raffan's points on activities 1 and 2, as they are quite reasonable.

**The Convener:** Subject to bringing forward part of phase 2, to put the inquiry into context and outline the European regulations, are we happy to proceed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Convener's Report

14:07

**The Convener:** The next item is the convener's report. The first item is a reply from the Scottish Executive on locating EU agencies in Scotland, which has just been passed to members. The committee will recall that we wrote to the Executive to ask for information on which EU agencies were up for grabs and which the Executive would target as a priority.

We have received a reply from Andy Kerr, dated 29 March. I am speaking slowly so that members have a chance to glance over his brief reply. The minister addresses the proposed Europass agency, which led to our original inquiry, but there is little reference to other agencies that might be on the horizon. One that comes to mind is the proposed defence procurement agency. Perhaps of even more relevance to Scotland is the agency for minority languages. Neither of those are mentioned in the minister's reply. All we have is a list of agencies and where they are currently based, and a little bit of information about the Europass agency.

Does any member wish to comment on the Executive's reply?

**Mrs Ewing:** Paragraph 2 of the letter states:

"Also, pending a proposal from the European Commission, a Community Fisheries Control Agency is to be located in Spain."

What stage is that at and when do we expect the Commission to agree to it?

**The Convener:** There is not a lot of information in the letter. I am not sure whether we are much further forward with the issue in which members expressed an interest.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind):** Is it too late for Scotland to put in a bid for the new Community fisheries control agency, bearing in mind the importance of fishing to the Scottish economy? I would have thought that it would make good political and economic sense for the European Union to locate its various agencies in areas with a specific interest. I recognise that Spain has an interest in fishing, but the Scottish Executive should be active—indeed, proactive—in trying to have a fisheries agency located in Scotland.

**The Convener:** The letter clearly states that the agency is to be located in Spain, which suggests that the decision has been made. However, if we decide to take further steps, we can find out the answer to that.

**Phil Gallie:** The letter says "pending a proposal".

**The Convener:** Yes, on the location.

**Mr Home Robertson:** I presume that some of these agencies will have decentralised structures. The fact that an agency's headquarters is in one location would not preclude parts of it being located in different parts of the Community, in which case we should seek that where it would be appropriate.

**The Convener:** Yes. I notice that the letter says of the Europass agency that

"it will be up to each Member State to decide on a location for their office."

That suggests that there will be some kind of decentralised structure. It strikes me that we are looking for a lot more information on the issue. We all have questions that are not answered in the letter.

**Mr Raffan:** It would be quite useful to have more information. It would also be interesting to know the history of our bids for agencies over the years. That would not involve an enormous amount of work and would be quite interesting background knowledge to have.

**Phil Gallie:** In the other papers, in a report on Council meetings, reference is made to Europass and the fact that quite a lot of deliberation is going on about it. Somebody has observed that Europass should not overlap with the nation state Europass agencies. The issue is obviously very much on-going, and no decisions have been made.

**Mr Home Robertson:** In discussing this type of thing, there is a slight risk of raking over things that we have failed to get in the past. This is a good example of areas in which we need advance information of what is coming so that we can get bids in early. It might be useful not only for the committee to engage in discussions with the Executive, but for the convener, the deputy convener and the clerk to get a briefing from the United Kingdom permanent representation to the European Union on what is coming through the system, so that we can get in early bids that would be genuinely relevant for Scotland.

**The Convener:** That is what we asked for in our original letter.

**Mr Home Robertson:** Exactly.

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** This is not going to be very helpful, but I asked the First Minister that very question at the last question time before the Christmas holidays. However, I cannot for the life of me remember what he said. I suggest that the clerks fish out the *Official Report* of that meeting.

**The Convener:** You have pre-empted my response to that. We will have to read the *Official Report* and see.

There are a couple of ways forward. Clearly, we want more answers. Like the committee, the Scottish Executive wants to secure agencies for Scotland. That is why a bid was put in to site the European Maritime Safety Agency in Glasgow, although it was unsuccessful. We can write back, asking for more information from the Scottish Executive and other appropriate authorities, or we can call people before the committee for half an hour or so, at one of our next meetings, to ask them questions on any strategy that might exist for securing agencies and to find out more answers. Those are two options. Do members have a preference? We could enter into more correspondence or put half an hour of a committee meeting aside and call ministers or the European Commission before the committee.

**Phil Gallie:** Going back to Dennis Canavan's comment, I think that we should focus on the Community fisheries control agency. He rightly talked about its importance to Scotland, but he then dropped in that he recognised its importance to Spain. Remembering the difficulties that we have had with the Spanish fleet, I think that it would be of great interest to hear about that. Anything that you could drop into a letter would be no bad thing.

**Dennis Canavan:** I agree.

**Mr Raffan:** I back that up. We need more background on the status of the decision to tell us whether it is a proposal from the Commission or a final decision, and whether we should bid for it.

**The Convener:** In that case, I suggest that we write to the Executive and the other appropriate authorities that we can identify to find out more information. We will put the matter on a future agenda as a separate item so that we can have a fuller discussion, and we will decide then whether to call witnesses. Is that agreed?

**Mr Home Robertson:** This is the sort of area in which we might get more information from informal soundings than from formal sessions. As a preliminary move, it would be helpful if you could have informal discussions and correspondence. Depending on the outcome of that, you can return to the committee with ideas for a hearing.

14:15

**The Convener:** I will find out whatever I can and we will bring a paper to the meeting at which we discuss the matter as a separate agenda item.

The second item is an update on the visit by a delegation from the Czech Parliament on 26 to 29 April 2004, which of course is just a couple of days

before their country joins the European Union. The committee has a continuing relationship with the Czech Parliament's Committee for European Integration, which I hope the visit will take a stage further. I see from the programme that the visit to Scotland lasts nearly a week; it is a full programme and the delegation is clearly enthusiastic about the visit. We will do our best to be good hosts.

**Mr Raffan:** On that point, the hospitality seems to be incredibly mean, even to an Aberdonian. We do not seem to be feeding the visitors with great regularity. Their first two evenings are free and there is no mention of a dinner—there is just a reception, and that is not good enough. Even if they have the first evening off, there should be a dinner.

On the reception, as the visit is pre-enlargement, it might be worth while to raise our sights a bit. We did that with Commonwealth day; we invited the high commissioners and, to our surprise, many of them came up from London specifically for the event because it was on a different day. We should approach some of the ambassadors and we should invite students from the accession countries who are studying at Scottish universities—or, rather, we should suggest that to the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, which is hosting the visit. There is no lunch listed for the visitors. They will go back as if they have been to a spa and lost weight.

**The Convener:** Although you made a couple of valid points and we take on board your comments, I point out that the paper is just a rough outline. The clerks and the other departments in the Parliament are busy working on the visit. I assure you that the delegates will be provided with food somewhere along the line during their five-day visit—I put that on the record.

**Mr Raffan:** I am based in Edinburgh and I would be happy to help out on the Sunday and Monday evenings so that they are not left on their own.

**The Convener:** Yes. I was lucky enough to be part of the Scottish Parliament delegation to Prague a year or two ago and we were treated very well, so I hope that we will return the favour.

**Dennis Canavan:** I assume that the Czech consul in Edinburgh will be fully involved in the activities. He has been active in trying to build good relations with the Parliament and the European and External Relations Committee.

**The Convener:** Yes. Paul Millar was pivotal in launching the programme and the visit, so he is at the heart of it.

We will take on board Keith Raffan's comments about involving other people in the receptions. It is in all our interests to build this up to be a good

event, particularly the reception with the consular corps.

**Mrs Ewing:** Given what we discussed at last week's meeting, could we ensure that they all get a miniature of Scottish Parliament whisky?

**The Convener:** We will make sure that they do. I also remind members that they will participate in a committee meeting on the Tuesday—that will be innovative.

## Scottish Executive (Scrutiny)

14:19

**The Convener:** We move on to the next item, which is pre and post-council scrutiny. As members can see, the papers cover only two or three councils. I invite comments from members.

**Mr Raffan:** Paragraph 4 of annex B to the paper is headed:

"Next generation of education spending programmes (Socrates, Leonardo and Tempus)".

My knowledge of those programmes is pretty limited. On the Tempus Plus mobility programme, the paper states:

"The programme, which currently only involves higher education, will be broadened to involve schools, vocational training and adult learning."

It would be of interest to both this committee and the Education Committee to know how the programme will be broadened. It might be worth while for us to take some evidence on that, to see how we can take maximum advantage of it and encourage far more students at school and higher levels to get involved and take advantage of such programmes. I think that awareness of them in Scotland is pretty limited—it certainly is as far as I am concerned.

**The Convener:** Are you suggesting that we should take up the matter, or do you simply want us to make the other relevant committees aware of it?

**Mr Raffan:** I would like to know more about those programmes, including the Erasmus programme, which is not mentioned in the paper, although I know that it is a higher education programme. I do not want to put the clerks to too much trouble, but I would certainly like to know more about them or at least be directed to websites from which I could find out more about them and how they are being broadened.

**The Convener:** Okay. We will certainly get a background paper on that.

Two issues came to my attention when I read the paper, the first of which relates to the report on the education, youth and culture council meeting on 26 February. Paragraph 5 of the report is on the European year of education through sport. The report states:

"The Commissioner said that her services had so far agreed to support 74 projects worth EUR4.4 million from some 600 applicants. They have a further EUR 2.1 million"

to be allocated in due course. Given the current debate about sport in Scotland, perhaps we should try to find out how Scotland has fared with



those projects. The issue might be of interest to the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on sports—I am taking advantage of Dennis Canavan's presence at the end of the table. Would members be happy to find out the extent to which Scotland has benefited?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** The other issue that came to my attention relates to the environment council. There is a reference to the

"rapid implementation of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan".

Given the fact that waste management is currently high up the political agenda in Scotland, we may want to find out about the implications of that for Scotland, because we want to ensure that Scotland is in the vanguard in developing such technologies. I would certainly be interested in finding out about Scotland's input.

**Mr Raffan:** I hope that there is a misprint in the first paragraph of page 8, which refers to "efforts to ... counter inclusion". I presume that it means efforts to counter exclusion.

**The Convener:** Yes. Well spotted.

## Sift

14:22

**The Convener:** Agenda item 4 is the sift paper. I invite comments from members on the paper.

**Mr Raffan:** I want to comment not on the documents of special importance, but on the main sift. Pages 2 and 3 repeat information, but what I want to say relates to what I said earlier about the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Tempus programmes. A document on "Making citizenship work: fostering European culture and diversity through programmes for Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Civic Participation" is mentioned, as well as a number of programmes in COM(2004) 152, COM(2004) 153 and COM(2004) 157. The last two documents relate to the Socrates and Tempus programmes. I would like to know more about those.

**The Convener:** Okay. We will get that information as part of the other information that we are seeking.

If there are no further comments on the sift paper, do members agree to it?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Agenda item 5 is our first discussion of the draft report on our inquiry into regional development funding. We will take the item in private, as previously agreed, so I bring the public part of the meeting to a close.

14:24

*Meeting continued in private until 16:00.*



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