

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 November 2004

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE 19th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (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)

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Rt hon Henry McLeish

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 23 November 2004

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:05*]

Item in Private

The Convener (Mr John Swinney): Good afternoon and welcome to the 19th meeting in 2004 of the European and External Relations Committee. I have received apologies from Alasdair Morrison, who cannot be with us today.

I advise members that Stephen Imrie has temporarily returned as clerk to the committee. Alasdair Rankin, our newly appointed clerk, was involved in a fairly serious accident on Thursday and will be out of action for about two months. The directorate of clerking and reporting has agreed that Stephen Imrie should come back and help us to complete our inquiry on the promotion of Scotland; he will be with us until late January, when Alasdair Rankin will return. On behalf of the committee, I send Alasdair our good wishes as he recovers from his injuries.

Members: Hear, hear.

The Convener: I seek the committee's agreement to consider item 7 in private. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Promoting Scotland Worldwide Inquiry

14:06

The Convener: Item 2 is the continuation of the committee's inquiry into the promotion of Scotland worldwide. It is my pleasure to welcome to the committee the right hon Henry McLeish, former First Minister of Scotland, to give his reflections on our inquiry. I invite Mr McLeish to say a few words by way of introduction and to give an explanation of the paper that has been circulated to members. I will then open the meeting to questions.

Henry McLeish: I thank the committee for the invitation to come to speak on what I regard as a very important subject. I hope that no one will blame me for the committee's late start; as we were walking down the Royal Mile, a journalist who was walking in front informed us that there was some kind of kerfuffle with an evacuation, so we slowed up. I apologise for any inconvenience.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): You do not believe journalists, do you?

The Convener: Please do not rise to the bait from Mr Home Robertson.

Henry McLeish: No comment.

This is my first meeting in the new Parliament building—indeed, it might be my last—and it is worth reflecting that, although it has been difficult getting here, this is an incredible, inspirational, innovative building and a great statement about Scotland. I have no doubt that in the next few years this will be a Parliament that people worldwide will visit. That reinforces the general comments that I want to make briefly before you start your questions.

Arthur Herman states in his book "How the Scots Invented the Modern World":

"being Scottish turns out to be more than just a matter of nationality or place of origin or clan or even culture. It is also a state of mind, a way of viewing the world and our place in it."

That is my theme today. I will talk briefly about why we should have a more important role on the world stage and why, given our history, our internationalism and our innovation, the world stage is the place for Scotland to be. After we won devolution for Scotland in 1997—the Parliament opened in 1999—it was vital that we concentrated on consolidating the Parliament, on holding elections and on developing domestic policy. However, I feel that it is appropriate now for the Parliament and the Executive to consider more carefully how we develop our role on the world stage.

Devolution gives us enormous opportunities that we did not have at Westminster as a set of ministers acting on Scotland's behalf in Governments of the time. We should be considering Scotland's role not only globally, but in Europe and in the changing relationships within the United Kingdom. Most people accept that we live in a world of rapid change, which is interconnected, international and interdependent. Virtually everything that we are doing in our country is touched by the international dimension. It therefore seems useful for us to analyse and understand what is happening, so that we can best deal with problems and challenges and exploit the enormous assets, resources and talents that this country has.

Some people call for a larger role on the world stage, but for what purpose? Of course we are idealistic and of course we are humanitarian, but I would like to think that a strategy for Scotland on the world stage is essentially rooted in practicalities. We are often in denial in this country. In terms of productivity, competitiveness, growth, work force participation rates, small business formation, research, design and technology, we often lag behind other parts of the UK, which in turn lag behind the best in Europe and in the United States. With an international dimension in tourism, technology, environment, the economy and transport, the world stage is rightly where we should be.

We should acknowledge what has been done. There is no doubt that the First Minister is right to be concerned about the size of the work force. We are looking at immigration and at migration generally. We are also looking at transport—we saw another link from Edinburgh to America developed recently by Continental Airlines. The Flanders agreement and the work in Brussels are also proceeding apace, so what is being done is heading in the right direction. The central thrust of my remarks today is to say, "Yes, that's fine, but it's not enough."

I suppose that the question that can be posed is how world class this country wants to be. There are many practical issues that we can discuss. The committee has been looking at many ideas and I would certainly like to contribute to the debate.

It is often difficult to look worldwide and see a model that we could take parts from, or replicate, in Scotland. However, Ireland is a small country that has shown that it can move in the space of 15 years from being a country with economic and modernisation problems to one that now bestrides the world stage. Ireland uses its diaspora, its skills, its focus, its determination and its commitment and it now sees itself as a key player. Indeed, if we believe the reports and quality-of-life

assessments, it is one of the best places in the world in which to live. I think that we can learn lessons from that.

Finally, all of that needs to be cloaked in a ruthless focus on the needs of this nation. "Ruthless" is an ugly word and does not radiate warmth, but to be focused we have to be ruthless in promoting our interests as we move forward. That does not mean that we are not cognisant of where we are or of what other people are doing; it means that we should be determined. If that can go with confidence, I am sure that we can make great strides over the next few years. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make those introductory remarks.

The Convener: Thank you for those remarks, Mr McLeish. One of the points that you made in your introduction—it is made again in the written submission—is that there is an opportunity to promote Scotland more vigorously on the international stage and that some of that opportunity was commenced during your term in office as First Minister. Notwithstanding your remark that we are moving in the right direction, do you think that the intensity and pace of development are commensurate with the opportunities that have been created by devolution over the past five years?

Henry McLeish: First, I am one of those people who believe that the progress that we have made under devolution has been enormous. I do not share the view of people who believe that we have been inundated with problems. There have been problems on the way, but we have a new legislature and 129 new MSPs spending money wisely and legislating wisely, so there is an awful lot that has happened and progress has been made on the international stage.

Secondly, I do not think that we are apprised of the urgency and immediacy of what is happening globally. Globalisation simply means the internationalisation of activities. It is a word that some people do not like but that other people embrace. There is also supranationalism: the European Union is a reality, with 25 countries, 460 million people and 20 per cent of world trade emanating from Europe in its relationship with the United States.

Thirdly, in this hierarchy we also have the changing face of the nation state. It is undoubtedly the case that the United Kingdom will cede more powers to Scotland in the years ahead. It will also cede more powers to Europe in the years ahead.

Finally, we are part of a new regionalism, which relates to the notion of being a competitive region in Europe. My concern is that, although we have made progress, we need to examine that issue closely. The new regionalism is an incredible

dynamic that is happening worldwide and it is affecting everything that we do. We need to analyse and understand it and then move on.

I think that a great deal more could be done. For me, urgency is required. It should not be five or 10 years before we start. It may be five or 10 years before we benefit, but we need a more formidable start or evolution of the current situation.

14:15

The Convener: Your submission refers to some difficulties that you encountered in your relations with the Westminster Government and the Foreign Office when you embarked on promoting these ideas, which you said were regarded as “forbidden territory” for the Scottish Executive. How much of an obstacle was that and to what extent has it been overcome by events? Does that remain a recurring problem, given that Scotland’s presence on the international stage is conditioned by how much the British embassy happens to promote Scotland in different markets, countries and continents?

Henry McLeish: The immediate issue is how we use existing United Kingdom institutions such as embassies, but we will also want to look closely at how the British Council and the British Tourist Authority represent our interests.

On Westminster, it is quite clear to me after the recent vote on a regional assembly in the north-east of England that there is not a huge appetite in London for much further devolution and regionalism. My concern is that, for most people at Westminster, devolution was about a domestic policy that would meet an aspiration that this country had had for nearly a century. However, there was little recognition at that point that Scotland might want to shape some of the things that we are involved in in a different way or that we might want to shake it in a complementary but nonetheless different way from that of Westminster.

Psychologically, the Westminster view is probably that Scotland should keep very much to domestic policy while complementing Westminster on external affairs, where that is necessary, without undermining what is happening at Westminster. I can accept all that. On the other hand, we will increasingly find that there are issues, problems and challenges that we will want to tackle differently, where we might find that concern is expressed about how different we should be able to be. The issue is not so much about powers—many of the things that we could do would not require further devolution of powers—but about spirit. I submit to the committee that Westminster might be uneasy about our moving further in that direction.

The issue can depend on personalities at Westminster and on who deals with the issues that are raised. I remember dealing with the Flanders agreement, which was signed with 11 regions in Brussels before the 2001 general election. On that occasion, I spoke to the then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who was absolutely excellent. Although it was an election period, he saw what we were doing as complementary rather than in any way as destabilising or threatening to our existing relationship.

I fear that there could be difficulties. However, if good will is expressed on both sides, I am sure that those difficulties can be overcome.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I will follow up some points that the convener raised. Of course, the issue depends on the personalities not just at Westminster but here in the Scottish Parliament. I want to boil the issue down by reducing this “forbidden territory” to specifics. For example, there has been criticism of the Executive for not making enough of our current presidency—which is coming to an end—of the regions with legislative power. Do you agree that we could have made a lot more of Regleg? Is that another example of the Scottish Executive treading very warily so as not to upset Whitehall or Westminster?

Henry McLeish: Post devolution, that has always been a concern. Devolution was a new initiative, a new development and a new set of ideas, so there was a psychology that said that we should move slowly, which was perhaps fair at the time.

I think that we could do more of the things that we already do on the European, global or UK stage and get more from them. As the phrase says,

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

What is important is that we move forward. If Scotland, through Scotland’s devolved Government, wants to shape things and be involved in a different way, we should not hesitate to have that frank discussion with my ex-colleagues at Westminster, possibly in private first but, inevitably, in public if nothing is resolved. I do not believe in confrontation with Westminster, but if there are issues that matter to Scotland on which we need to do things differently, we should bite the bullet and ensure that we take them to Westminster.

Mr Raffan: I want to pin you down on the question that I asked. The Executive has been criticised for its presidency of Regleg. If you had still been First Minister, what would you have done differently? We have heard your rhetoric, but how, in substance, would you have made a difference with Regleg? Do you think that the Executive has made the most of it?

Henry McLeish: In politics, if someone says that they have made the most of something, they are being complacent. In the grand scheme of things, more can be done on any initiative, so more could have been done on the Regleg initiative.

Mr Raffan: What would you have done?

Henry McLeish: My contribution to the committee is also to highlight one of the problems. Before we can move in the direction in which we want to move and before we can take on responsibilities and challenges, we have to define our role, whether in Europe, in America through tartan day activities or internationally. Not enough policy work is being done to identify why we are in Europe, why we are in the relationships that we are in and why we sign up to agreements. We have to ask what is in the best interests of Scotland, but that can be woolly because the question does not travel. If we are in an organisation, we have to identify what we need to get out of it. In a lot of the activities in which we are involved, we are not quite sure of the long-term objective, but it is a good thing to be involved.

Mr Raffan: You say in your written evidence:

"we should no longer have a part-time approach to Scotland's place in the world."

Do you think that we are part timers?

Henry McLeish: I was referring to the fact that a minister who has enormous domestic responsibilities cannot also have responsibility for external affairs. That is why I said—we might get on to this—that it would be useful to have a statement of intent that, because the international scene is vital in all its forms, we should have a dedicated minister with responsibility for external affairs and the resources with which to carry that role out.

Mr Raffan: So we are weakened at the moment because not just one minister but six ministers have in one way or another some responsibility for external relations. You would like an exclusive departmental minister.

Henry McLeish: I would, but they should not take on all the responsibilities for industry through Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise or tourism and culture. I see their role as the driver or the engine of our contribution to the international scene. That is why we require a minister at Cabinet level who can have direct, immediate and complementary access to the First Minister.

That would do a number of things. First, it would provide a focus. Secondly, it would allow us to develop a strategic overview. Thirdly, it would provide a policy focus and, equally important, it would be a statement of intent. Despite how well

we have done in many areas, we come back to the issue of how world class we want to be. Other countries, such as Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, and some of the smaller states in America have shown us that things can be done differently. If we had a dedicated department and minister, we could do things differently, too.

Mr Raffan: No doubt you have seen the Executive's European strategy and its international relations strategy. There have been criticisms that they are diluted and unclear. What do you think of them?

Henry McLeish: A lot in both the strategies is absolutely fine and deals with the issues with which we have to deal in the 21st century. I stress that in any organisation we need a focus. I believe that the international dimension is vital in relation to technology and industry. We have technology agreements with three states in America and we could probably have more. If something is vital to our national welfare in relation to the economy and employment, it cannot be something that does not fit in with devolution in the eyes of some, with some departmental ministers agreeing to taking on some of it. In the interests of Scotland, we need a focus.

I return to what I said about being ruthless. The Irish are where they are not just because Ireland is a separate country, but because they had good notions, good ideas, good people abroad and an interested diaspora. We have to focus in a ruthless, efficient, business-like way. International relations are about the national interest, which is our lead.

The Convener: The central point of your reflection is that the Government's current strategy is fine as far as it goes but must be much more intensively focused if it is to deliver some of the objectives that you, I and the Executive could agree on. The delivery mechanisms are not a point of agreement, however.

Henry McLeish: That is one issue, but another issue might be one that has the potential to cause an element of discord in the Parliament. As far as I am concerned, the European dimension is not being given as high a priority as it should in the United Kingdom at the moment. There are tactical reasons why questions around the constitution and the euro are being left to the side. I understand that. The interesting point about our European position, however, is that we have to be in Europe. Europe is vital to our concerns. As we look to the future, Scotland should take a much more robust role in terms of our link with a growing Europe. At times, that means that we might have to embrace the notion of Europe in a more spirited way and confront what I must describe, at the risk of irritating certain members of the committee, as an unholy alliance between those who want out of

Europe and those who want to denigrate everything that emerges from Europe. That approach cannot be right for Scotland.

The Convener: I expect that we will talk about Europe a great deal more later on.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I am trying to reconcile what you are saying with the position of Scotland as a devolved country within the UK. Presumably, you feel that there are tremendous benefits in being part of the UK delegation in terms of the strength that it has in Europe. That clearly outweighs the strength that some of the smaller nations have in Europe.

Henry McLeish: Absolutely. We are not talking about a manifesto for constitutional change, which some people might want.

The Convener: Heaven forbid! What a prospect.

Henry McLeish: I see the convener smile wryly.

The Executive has been involved in some controversial issues, such as agriculture, Scotland's dominance in the fishing industry and so on, that create difficult tensions. When I am arguing for Scotland to have a bigger role in Europe, I am suggesting that we should forge bilateral alliances with the key regional players in Europe.

Irene Oldfather: Tuscany, Catalonia—

Henry McLeish: Exactly. And Bavaria and so on. The approach should be complementary to the approach through Westminster. I am not saying that we can do better on our own in relation to every issue. Being part of the United Kingdom in the European Union gives us great strength. When I talk about widening our links in Europe, I am not suggesting that we should do so at the expense of existing bilateral arrangements between the UK and the EU; I am suggesting that we build our own links in relation to science, technology and environmental issues. That work is at an early stage and could be accelerated.

Irene Oldfather: When you were First Minister, you started the ball rolling in some of those areas and we are continuing to develop links with Tuscany and Catalonia, for example. However, how do we reconcile that with some of the suggestions that you have made? I am working out the issues in my head and would like you to expand a little on what you have said.

Clearly, Ireland is a separate member state and therefore has to have its own equivalent of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and so on. Earlier, however, you talked about the practical aspects of promoting Scotland in terms of tourism, culture and investment. I am not sure that we would necessarily always need first secretaries or

embassies to help in that regard. I am thinking, for example, about the kind of role that Scottish Development International plays across the globe and the way in which VisitScotland participates in VisitBritain's work. What would be the value-added aspect of what you are suggesting?

Henry McLeish: It is interesting to view Ireland in terms of globalisation. A lot of people think that, in the 21st century, being an independent country conveys a great deal to you. However, if we look at Ireland's economy and bear in mind the effect of the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund and the fact that Ireland is part of the euro zone, which means that decisions on interest rates are not taken in Ireland, we find that—with the exception of corporation tax and some other key levers—there is not that much difference between Scotland and Ireland, although one is recognised worldwide as being an independent country.

The second point is about practicalities. We have a good position in the British embassy in Washington with the first secretary. If we are being serious—and I believe that, after his trip to China, the First Minister is considering establishing a new post in Beijing—there is no reason why we should not expand our representation and examine where our interests could be better represented by putting someone in places such as Paris, Tokyo, Beijing or Delhi, for example. Where we put people would be linked to our needs and where we should be. Taxpayers pay for all that and we want a return that is in the interests of Scotland and the taxpayer.

On Irene Oldfather's other point, devolution enables us to look at things differently. For a minister at Westminster, things are very different. It seems to me that we do not need to be threatening in any way to the UK. We do not need to be undermining what is happening in the UK's relationship, of which we are part, with the EU. We can be focusing on different ways in which Scotland could be more dynamic without undermining the basic link that we already have with the UK.

14:30

Irene Oldfather: You have said that pushing at the boundaries is no bad thing. However, it is also important to move slowly, to find out what works and to build on that experience. We should not just rush out there.

The Convener: The flipside of the argument for a presence in Delhi, Beijing, Tokyo and Paris is that the current arrangement does not serve Scotland as effectively as it should. Surely that was your motivation when you established our presence in Washington.

Henry McLeish: I might be able to give the committee an insight into that. The idea came from the then British ambassador to Washington. When I was over there in 2001, he informed me that Northern Ireland had representation in Washington. That was interesting to me, because Northern Ireland is part of the UK. He was suggesting that, without a great deal of effort on our part, it would help him and his contacts with Scotland as part of the UK to have someone—not necessarily a Scot—to represent Scotland's interests at the heart of our embassy set-up. That made sense to me. I am arguing that, on one hand, need must be identified and that, on the other hand, we could help with the work of the UK embassies.

Let us consider Scottish Enterprise, tourism, SDI and all the agencies. Someone told me—I could be wrong on this—that we have 20 offices worldwide. I am sure that the committee is trying to find out their value to us. If we also take positions in embassies, a network will be built up that is not threatening to the UK—it will be complementary—and that will give us a vehicle for shaping Scottish policy in a way that we could not have done previously. To me, that could be a good way of spending public funds, if we take account of the environment, the economy, tourism, transport and the other practical issues from which we can benefit.

The Convener: I will take your Northern Ireland example a little further. The Northern Ireland office in Washington is no longer based in the British embassy, but has a stand-alone presence with its own identity. Having visited it with members of the committee, I believe that it has a very impressive contribution to make. Is that a model that you believe will have attractions for Scotland?

Henry McLeish: I know that the model was devised for Northern Ireland because of the significant problems that Northern Ireland has had, most of which are—thankfully—being overcome. My direct answer to your question is that it could be a model for Scotland, but not necessarily. In Scotland at the moment, there are many areas of policy in which there is not a great deal of thinking. That is why it is rewarding that the committee is examining the area of global relations. It might well be that we should analyse what Northern Ireland has done to see whether we should follow its example or do something different.

In your question and my answer, we see that there are new ways of looking at old problems and challenges. Scotland has not been good at thinking outside the box but, if we do so, we can come up with some novel solutions to these problems.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): I return to your point about the attitudes at Westminster

and Whitehall, where some people regarded Scotland's wider role as allegedly "forbidden territory". Did you encounter that attitude before the Scottish Parliament was set up when you were involved in negotiations on behalf of the Scottish Office on the contents of the Scotland Bill? Who was responsible for that attitude? Was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office primarily responsible for that or were other Government departments also involved? Also, was it primarily officialdom that the Scottish Office was up against or was it some of the elected representatives?

Henry McLeish: In answer to the first question, it was mainly after 1999 in discussions on certain things that we were doing that we sometimes experienced a perceived or practical resistance. To be honest, the issue did not focus many minds at Westminster while the legislation was being prepared, from the devolution white paper onwards. At that time, people were caught in a situation in which, after 100 years, devolution was about to become a reality. With a white paper that would become legislation, so many things were happening that the issue did not figure as a concern. Minds were focused on different things at the time. The issue began to emerge only after 1999.

To be fair to Westminster, although we in Scotland consider devolution as something that we support and see the benefits of—many of us, including Dennis Canavan, championed devolution and campaigned for it for a long time—that view is not necessarily shared widely in the two major political parties, or, indeed, in other parties, at Westminster. That psychology comes through.

My occasional concern is that we are now moving in directions that were never envisaged at Westminster prior to the devolution white paper and the subsequent legislation. Post the devolution vote in the north-east of England, my concern is that we ask ourselves "Whither now?" for devolution in England. Without further devolution in England—convener, I am straying, but I will come back to the issue—we will end up with devolution in the United Kingdom only in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That could keep us vulnerable and isolated. My view is that we should act as a model and an advocate for devolution in England.

Given all that has happened, it is no surprise that the north-east of England did not vote yes. However, if we had a regionalised England with assemblies moving at different paces, there would be different views about the roles of the United Kingdom and Europe. That would make for a much healthier and more diversified UK than if we remain with the current arrangement whereby we have devolution to the north and west, and further to the west, in Northern Ireland. That is my concern.

Dennis Canavan: During your time as a member of the Scottish Executive, did that resistance at Whitehall and Westminster get stronger or weaker?

Henry McLeish: Not enough issues were contested for me to be able to judge that. We occasionally had delicate and testy discussions on the Flanders initiative but because we were dealing with so many other aspects of devolution, I did not want to make a big issue of the matter at the time. I think that things have moved on to the point at which, in future, we may well force boundaries and take them further. At that point, there might be an interchange with Westminster.

Dennis Canavan: My other question is on the proposal in the submission, that states:

"There is a pressing need for a Department of External Affairs, properly resourced and staffed, with a designated Cabinet Minister to rationalise the international aspects of other departments."

When I listened to the radio this morning, the BBC was quoting Scottish Executive spin doctors who were trying to discredit you in advance of your appearance here this afternoon by claiming that your proposal had been overtaken by events. They said that the Scottish Executive already has a presence in Brussels and in the United States and a Scottish presence is proposed for Beijing. How do you reply to that criticism and to the questions that members of the public might raise about whether your proposal would be a wise use of public money? You said that there has to be some return for Scotland. The public need to be convinced that a department of external affairs would be a good and wise public investment, so will you give concrete examples of the potential positive return for Scotland?

Henry McLeish: We will not get down to the detail today, but I will try to answer Dennis Canavan's point. We should be trying to secure not "some return" for what we do but all possible benefits from taxpayers' investments. We want to analyse the situation properly and ensure that there is a return for the country.

The events strategy, which should automatically be part of the work of a department of external affairs, has gone reasonably well. It has been resourced, there has been investment and we have secured events such as the MTV awards or the Ryder cup in 2013, which is the third most popular televised event in the world. Such events bring practical benefits by creating employment and intangible benefits to do with national pride, prestige and feeling good about our country.

I will give another practical example to do with domestic policy. England has taken a distinctive view on how to deal with offenders and prison populations, which in some respects mirrors that

of the United States but does not mirror that of Scotland. We must make a judgment about whether we should learn from Finland, where the prison population has been halved during the past five years, and whether we should take account of the different views in Denmark, Sweden and Finland about alcoholism and drug abuse and consider putting in prison only the people who need to be there to protect the public. A coherent strategy could bring the significant benefits that people want to identify and discuss.

I am glad that Dennis Canavan mentioned spin doctors, because I receive less opprobrium for attacking spin doctors than I do for attacking politicians. Spin doctors are there to spin—the definition of spin is interesting—and not to reflect on what we are discussing. It is true that we have a presence in Washington and that we might have a presence in Beijing. However, that misses the point. We are talking about a big issue, which is not about getting first secretaries in embassies but about saying, "Our history of internationalism and innovation demands that we have a different view of where we are in the world." So we could do this or that. For example, we could set up all the ministers and departments that we want, although that would not necessarily solve the problems.

However, my proposed approach would provide focus and strategy and address some of the practical points that Dennis Canavan raised, which are not currently being addressed. The international element is grafted on to devolution and on to the roles of the Parliament and the Executive. I argue that that element should be important as we move forward in the 21st century. However, we must always add the qualification that whether we are talking about the health service, education or international affairs, money must be spent wisely. If we had an external affairs department we could analyse the policy element first, and it might be two, three or four years before we took action on a matter. Nevertheless we would be saying to the world that we were taking the issue seriously.

Today, the BBC mentioned Scotland's tremendous reputation in science but described how scientists in Scotland think that resources for science are inadequate. We are trying to attract more scientists to Scotland, which is an international issue. It would be better if we had a minister who could say at a Cabinet meeting, "By the way, we need investment in this. I will give a lead on the matter and I want to be taken seriously." That does not currently happen.

Irene Oldfather: May I follow up that point?

The Convener: Very briefly.

Irene Oldfather: Henry McLeish gave the practical example of the MTV awards. Does not

the fact that the First Minister took a lead in relation to the awards knock back your argument? The approach worked and the awards came to Scotland. Similarly, the Ryder cup will come to Scotland, even though we have no minister for external affairs. Direction from the top is important.

14:45

The Convener: Please give a brief answer to that, Mr McLeish.

Henry McLeish: I have said that I believe that much progress has been made. My point is that this is perhaps the time to make a quantum leap in our approach to all the issues. I acknowledge that the First Minister has given a lead on immigration and that work has been done on, for example, the MTV awards and doing more in Europe. However, it is in the national interest for much more to be done—it is a question of evolution. I am not reinventing the wheel in anything that I say today; I am trying to give importance to the issue and to have that translated into parliamentary and Executive roles.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): You have given positive evidence to the committee and I am much encouraged by your idea that we can force boundaries with the UK Parliament and that it will cede more powers. I think that we all probably agree that devolution is a journey, although I suspect that some of us want to go to different destinations—but that is political life.

I want to pursue the point about resistance that you raised in your submission. You said that there should be

“resistance from Holyrood and St Andrew’s House”

to the Whitehall ethos. Is much of that tied up with the civil service? There is a debate about whether Scotland should have its own civil service, distinct from Whitehall.

Henry McLeish: On your first point, somebody said that it is always better to travel, even though you might never reach your destination.

Mrs Ewing: Ah well, we will get there.

Henry McLeish: Until 1997, the UK was one of the most centralised countries in western Europe. That situation changed dramatically in 1997. However, it often takes much longer for such changes to be appreciated more widely. The north-east of England referendum result on a regional assembly was not surprising, given the political input. However, I believe that there is also resistance from the civil service in London to decentralisation. The civil service has a distinguished background in global affairs that goes back centuries, but it is still highly centralised. There is nothing in the political

settlements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales that would undermine that position. That is why I suggest that, after proper analysis and policy debate, if there are areas that we want to go to, it would be useful to have a dialogue with Westminster about them. My politics are well known—I like being part of the UK. However, if we want to shape certain issues differently—I agree that adjustments are needed—we should be willing to talk to Westminster about them, whether we are talking about powers or simply the psychology of the situation.

Mrs Ewing: My experience of dealing with the civil service in London is that the imperial tradition comes through generation after generation. Scotland could be key to changing attitudes within the civil service. You touched briefly on the issue of Scotland leading delegations, particularly in Europe. As you will know, that issue involves the vexed questions of fishing and agriculture, which are key aspects of Scotland’s economy. My understanding is that Scottish ministers have led three European delegations—two involving health and one involving education—by accident, because the UK minister did not turn up. Is the Executive doing enough to push for Scotland to ensure that our people are not just on the periphery of discussions as observers, but are leading them and casting a vote?

Henry McLeish: The person who is sitting next to you—John Home Robertson—is probably in a better position to provide insights into your question. When I was First Minister and when John Home Robertson and I were members of the Government, we did not move the debate on a great deal. In the early years of devolution, it was felt that those were reserved matters that had an enormous impact on Scotland, and that that was how it should be. However, my concern for the future is that, unless there is a better accommodation between Westminster and the aspirations of the Scottish Parliament and the Executive on, for example, the implementation of European regulation, regional policy and agricultural and fishing policy, the delegation issue will continue to be problematic for the Parliament and it could occasionally be destabilising.

On reflection, if the policy is well thought out, I do not see a problem with our leading delegations. There is a particularly strong case for that to happen in the areas of agriculture and fishing. They stand out because of the preponderance of our interest in those matters.

I am not so sure about other areas—there again, it is about how we view them. For example, it is possible to envisage that there will always be tensions around fishing because of the pro-north-east, pro-fishing context. In the whole scheme of European matters, however, any issue is part of a

wider set of bargaining and discussions. Unless we work out where we want to be on some of those issues, we will not make any progress, and unless further accommodations are made, the present difficulties will continue.

Mrs Ewing: When you say "further accommodations", do you mean—

Henry McLeish: A more significant role for us.

Mrs Ewing: So, you mean that the Executive should be pushing for the lead on delegations.

Henry McLeish: And on policy, too. There is no point in making an issue only about who takes the lead on delegations. Although it is possible to make that a point of principle and exploit it politically, at the end of the day, policy is pretty crucial too. I think that some progress could also be made in that respect.

Mr Home Robertson: I will make two points, the first of which follows on from Margaret Ewing's line of questioning. Is the description "forbidden territory" in relation to Westminster and Whitehall's perception of Scotland an entirely fair one? My experience in the first year after devolution, as Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs with responsibility for fishing, does not bear that out. I found that ministerial colleagues at Westminster and Whitehall civil servants were quite excited about the prospect of this new role for Scotland. Indeed, Scotland took a pretty prominent role, to the extent that we represented the United Kingdom at European agriculture and fisheries council meetings and took a predominant role in decision making. The United Kingdom permanent representation to the European Union and the civil service helped to drive through that role. Is what you are saying not more about the perceived chip on the shoulder—the whingeing Jock stuff—rather than the reality of the situation?

Henry McLeish: No. I have never been interested in any of that. I was trying to make the point that, in anything that is connected to foreign affairs or foreign policy, only a few people at Westminster take the benevolent view that they would like to see Scotland doing a great deal more than is the case at present.

You mentioned fishing, but I did not say that the daggers are always drawn. In response to Margaret Ewing's question, I said that two issues are involved: the leadership of delegations and policy developments. I was not particularly hard in my criticism. All that I said was that it is in the nature of a devolved Parliament for there always to be on-going issues, given that the political composition of the situation could ebb and flow. We could simply say, "Fine, we can accommodate that. It is just a bit of tension." On the other hand, as devolution evolves, there may be a different way of dealing with some of the European issues.

At the moment, we do not have the analysis. What would be our intentions? With the greatest respect to the convener, those issues can be the subject of a politically exploitable debate or a practical debate. Often, the two meet; but sometimes they do not. I did not want to belittle anything that was achieved in the discussions to which John Home Robertson referred. However, there is a wider canvas and I know that when European areas such as Flanders take initiatives, that is not looked on so favourably by Westminster.

Mr Home Robertson: The position is evolving, and you are quite right to say that it is easier when one has cohabitation—when people of the same political perspective are at Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. It would be more difficult if the political composition of each were to go in opposite directions.

My second point concerns your introductory remarks about our new building—members would expect me to welcome them. You spoke about our taking a quantum leap. However, one thing that we do not need to start now, or in the foreseeable future, is a costly and ambitious Scottish embassy building programme around the world.

Henry McLeish: That is not what is being advocated.

Mr Home Robertson: Exactly. So what we need to do is to use our existing vehicles to more efficient effect.

Henry McLeish: Quantum leap is about thought and attitude. At the start, I made the point that we live in different times—this is the 21st century. As a consequence, we should consider our role in the world and see where we are. What I advocate is based on need. The Washington initiative was a good initiative. I think that the First Minister thinks that too, as he hopes to do the same in Beijing. We can do such things, which do not undermine Westminster but are complementary to what Westminster does.

On your concerns, when I talk about a quantum leap, I mean a leap in thinking. I fear that the great problem in Scotland at the moment is that there is not enough thinking on many issues. A quantum leap conceptually might lead to sensible and serious analytical solutions to some of our problems. Those solutions must be tested, as there could be problems if public funds were used in areas that people perceive to be the proper jurisdiction of Westminster rather than Edinburgh. It is a matter of evolution. However, the building is still a good building.

The Convener: You have successfully ingratiated yourself to John Home Robertson, if to nobody else.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): When I was listening to Henry McLeish's opening remarks, I thought for a moment that I had heard them all before, as he seemed to be going down the line of arguing the case for independence for the Scottish voice in Europe, which is the case that John Swinney and Margaret Ewing used to argue.

Henry McLeish: But they are nationalists, are they not?

Phil Gallie: That is right. However, I will carefully read what you said. It certainly struck a chord with the idea of independence in Europe.

It is worth recording and acknowledging that when we discuss the progress that Ireland has made, that progress was made with funds from the UK and Germany as the two net contributors to the European Union. Perhaps that is the purpose of Europe, but our money has allowed you to heap praise on Ireland.

In your submission, you strongly advocate that the Scottish Parliament and the Executive should get behind the European constitution. Given that that would basically mean—as you have said—that there would be a loss of power to the Scottish Parliament and to the UK Parliament, why do you feel so strongly about signing up to the European constitution?

Henry McLeish: I will make a serious point. I am not a nationalist with a capital "N", but I think that Scotland, in its new devolved state, should think differently and move forward. I am simply pro-Europe—I cannot say more than that. Europe is a good place for Scotland and the UK to be. Much of what comes out of Europe is covered unfairly. This is about trade, 60 per cent of our economy and a number of practical issues for Scotland.

I will be slightly controversial about the constitution for a moment. I support the constitution because it seems to be a logical step to take to integrate and move forward. We are not talking about conceding a great deal more, but a constitution will unite Europe. We do not have a constitution here. When the European constitution is eventually agreed, I would like people to think about how then to recognise in it the importance of provinces, states and areas such as Scotland. For example, we have a Parliament in Edinburgh by courtesy of the Scotland Act 1998, but there are no constitutional safeguards whatsoever for the Parliament. A one-line bill at Westminster could change the situation and remove, or—conceivably—add, powers. Opponents of the constitution say that it is a bad thing because it would tie us in, but there are many benefits from being in Europe. I would like to think that there will be evolution and that Scottish devolution will have

constitutional safeguards that it currently does not have.

John Home Robertson made a good point about personalities possibly causing problems. Different political compositions in Edinburgh and London will evolve over the next 20 or 30 years. In that context, a constitution is important for Europe and its side-benefit in the longer term could be constitutional safeguards for Scotland.

Phil Gallie: I have not seen anything in the constitution that suggests that the Scottish Parliament is guaranteed.

Henry McLeish: There is nothing in it about that.

Phil Gallie: That is therefore not a reason for supporting the constitution. I also think that any threat to the Scottish Parliament, either at present or well into the future, is politically most unlikely in the United Kingdom.

You advocate the appointment of an external affairs minister to the Cabinet. I would ask you to reflect on the number of ministers who looked after Scotland's affairs prior to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. How many ministers are involved now? How many would be involved if yet another minister was imposed to cover external affairs? Other members of the Parliament ask for specific ministers for specific issues.

15:00

Henry McLeish: Because I do not have to answer as a politician, I will be courteous in my response to that question. I think that it is accepted that that is a red herring. In Westminster, we were ministers in the Scottish Office for a brief period—there were loads of ministers in the period since the war who administered Scotland's affairs. The Scottish Parliament and devolution represent an entirely different democratic challenge.

I hear the point that you are making, which is that we do not need another minister, because that would just add to the size of the Cabinet. That could be an argument for examining Cabinet responsibilities and assessing how the international dimension vies for priority with existing measures. The idea of having such a role in the Cabinet would give a focus and leadership and would allow us to develop some of the areas that we have been talking about this afternoon in a more relaxed and structured way.

Phil Gallie: Andy Kerr was the one minister who came along to the committee and came up with some answers—I did not always like his answers, but at least he came up with some. He was the minister with responsibility for external affairs and seemed to cope with that role, along with his other roles, fairly well. I cannot understand why we

would want to create another channel of expenditure, which ministerial positions carry with them given the support that ministers require.

Henry McLeish: I have already made the point about expenditure being vital. A lot of what we are doing in Scotland has an international dimension, but I do not think that it is co-ordinated well enough or that it is being driven hard enough. I do not think that one human being can do all the various domestic jobs associated with being a minister and also take on the responsibility of looking after our international dimension. That is unfair, and Scotland does not get the best return from it.

The Convener: In response to John Home Robertson's question about not wanting to add to public expenditure by embellishing the arrangements that we have for the promotion of Scotland overseas, you agreed with his assessment that it was important to use what we have more effectively. I can understand that line of argument, but it somewhat contradicts what is in your written evidence. You make a pretty blunt point:

"The Scotland-UK relationship also raises the question of the effectiveness of such agencies as the British Tourist Authority, the British Council, the DTI and the Foreign Office in representing Scotland's particular interests abroad."

I sense that you would not have written that unless you thought that those organisations were not particularly good at promoting Scotland overseas. I am trying to establish just how big the problem is and what needs to be done to promote Scotland.

Henry McLeish: It is a fair question. I mentioned the British Council and the British Tourist Authority earlier. I had some experience with both organisations. They aim to project the United Kingdom and all parts of it—but they cannot do that. The important point as far as the UK is concerned is that we are in a competitive situation. The UK is constructed on the basis that nobody is competing internally—but we are: we are competing with the north-east of England, the north-west, London and the south-east, and we should not apologise for that. The economy is fiercely competitive and, if we are looking out for Scotland, we have to recognise that. I asked myself how those organisations deal with the Scottish dimension and whether, through discussions with them, that could be improved. Alternatively, should VisitScotland consider doing more?

The issues around the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office capture some of what we were speaking about earlier. I believe that a unified United Kingdom of 60 million people with no regional dimension in England is not good for the future of devolution in Scotland or the United

Kingdom. That is why I feel that, if we are in a competitive mode in relation to the English regions, as we should be, we need to examine closely the question of who is representing us and who is doing what. UK taxpayers, including Scottish taxpayers, pay for that. This is also about the return that we get from the efforts that are made.

We discussed with the British Council a new way of promoting the UK with a Scottish dimension. There were a few meetings at which I had to make the point to the British Council that, in my judgment, that was not the best way to represent our interests. We should remember that we are a country of 5 million people and although we are a very important part of the UK, we are only a part of it. If we accept a competitive view of life, as we must do in the 21st century, we must question what is being done on our behalf, which may be fine, but it may not be. Then we must consider the question of duplication in relation to our own authorities.

The Convener: That is a helpful answer.

In relation to competition and the European Union, you ask in your submission

"whether Scotland should have a more direct view on issues such as increased regulation and regional policy."

The current Administration has as its top priority the pursuit of economic growth. I warmly share that view. When you mentioned regulation, which comes predominantly from the EU, but potentially also from the UK Government, what specific issues did you think that the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament would need to pursue to streamline or improve regulation to deliver economic growth? How does that fit into the wider debate about competitiveness across the EU, which I suspect will dominate many European discussions in the months to come?

Henry McLeish: "Competitiveness" seems to be a word that some people do not find terribly acceptable; they think that we should not be competing. However, the world, Europe and the UK are all fiercely competitive, so competitiveness will become more of an issue. We constantly considered issues that affected our competitiveness.

Some people argue—convincingly, at times—that regulation can be a problem. Yesterday, I listened to the distinguished lawyer Gordon Jackson on one of the BBC's great programmes at 7 o'clock with Colin MacKay. He made a distinction between substance and procedure—he was talking about the law, of course. A lot of stuff to do with regulation comes from Europe—as the committee will know, because it deals with it—and the UK. If we view competitiveness differently from the way in which Westminster views it, we might

well want to consider with our business community what would be in its best interests as regards regulation. That is one dimension.

The EU's regional policy is significant, but how well are we doing on that? How well are our priorities reflected in discussions? If Scotland is to compete with other nations and other regions of the UK, it might want to do things differently. The flavour of my remarks is that devolution opens up enormous opportunities. If those opportunities are linked to the nation's needs, we will think differently, simply by virtue of where we are. I am arguing for us to adopt a constructive position on that, which is about our having a questioning and inquiring attitude. That is a question of our recognising that we need to consider how we are different—our business community is different and we have different problems—but not for the sheer political hell of it.

If we take the issues that I mentioned to begin with—productivity, competitiveness, growth, workforce participation rates and research and development—then, my goodness, there is some world-class excellence in Scotland, but much of what we do lags behind what is done in certain regions in England. We must not be in denial about that. We must consider every possible way of improving our competitiveness in dialogue and discussion with both the EU and the UK.

Mr Raffan: I want to follow on from that point. The competition is hard. You mentioned Ireland. President McAleese leads trade delegations; presidents meet her and everyone below them meets, so the doors open wider than they do for our trade delegations. I am trying to get at specific suggestions. Should our trade delegations have much more ministerial leadership?

Henry McLeish: Ministerial leadership is important, but devolution gives us a new chance to do things differently in our democracy. Why does Parliament not play a more significant role?

Mr Raffan: What should that role be?

Henry McLeish: That role is not an issue that we touched upon, but it interests me. There should not be partisan differences in respect of many of the matters that we have talked about today, perhaps—I say to Phil Gallie—with the exception of the European Union. Promoting Scotland and selling it to the world is not a deeply divisive or partisan issue. In terms of the example of Ireland, there is no reason why the Executive and Parliament cannot be instrumental in taking a more upfront approach.

Mr Raffan: How?

Henry McLeish: First, the areas of need that I talked about—specifically financial services, oil and a range of tourism activities—could be

considered in much more focused way. Ministers and senior officers of the Parliament, such as the European and External Relations Committee's convener, could lead on that. We have talked about Ireland, but when I go to the United States I am always struck by the fact that we, too, have a diaspora, but it is largely asleep.

Mr Raffan: How do we wake it up? It is a sleeping giant, but where is the alarm clock?

Henry McLeish: I come today bearing not gifts, but ideas. It strikes me that the Irish are lively and bubbly and that they are everywhere in the United States. There are a lot of them, but there are a lot of Scots. Six of the United States' founding fathers were of Scots descent.

The Convener: But they were slightly quieter.

Henry McLeish: Yes. I am not arguing for smoking bans and other such things—let us not get into that. However, the diaspora is a resource that we could utilise. We could take up a number of ideas and issues.

Mr Raffan: I am still not clear about how to wake up the diaspora. I refer you to the position of first secretary for Scottish affairs, which we have in the United States. She is very good, but she is very stretched. Should the job remit of first secretary be much more economically focused, for example on inward investment and trade, rather than be spread too thin across a range of areas?

The Convener: It would be pleasant for the sound system if you could speak into the microphone, Keith.

Henry McLeish: The developments in embassies are good, but it is up to the Executive and the committee to decide whether there should be priorities in the embassy work and whether current staffing is sufficient. On the basis of need, you may want to suggest changes. We should move cautiously with other embassies, with the proviso that we should assess need and determine what is in Scotland's interests. We can do positive work—especially with the United States—in a number of areas such as universities, technology agreements, science, design and research.

Mr Raffan: In your written submission you say that

"we need a much more positive and pro-active embrace of Europe."

The Convener: I want to continue with questions on America—we will come back to Europe.

Irene Oldfather: I will follow up on points that you made about tartan day, which you were involved in over a number of years. The committee visited the United States, and we found that tartan

day tended to be centred on the east coast. You suggest in your submission that

“the open doorway to America provided by Tartan Day ... should be developed into a major initiative for industry, tourism, education.”

How could we do that? My impression is that tartan day tends to concentrate on Washington and New York, and does not get out into the wider Scottish diaspora across the United States—the sleeping giant that you talk about waking. Would you like to share your thoughts on that?

Henry McLeish: The American Congress decided that 6 April would be tartan day. In some respects, the title is misleading. I would love to see that title changed, because it should not just be a day that is decreed by Congress; it should be a window on America that opens up for us for a week or two every year.

Within the embassy structure we have consulates—I think that there are four or five in the United States. They are geographically dispersed in, for example, California and in Houston, Texas. More use could be made of the consulates, because they are British representation in those areas. For example, oil connections could be made in Houston.

The first thing I would do would be to move the focus of tartan day away from the east coast. Secondly, we should be much more focused on what we are doing. I criticise myself in that in our initial involvement in tartan day, we planned our visits without giving a great deal of thought to whether they were about science and universities or inward investment. There is a blunderbuss approach, which must be narrowed to something that is more focused.

15:15

Irene Oldfather: The Northern Ireland office in the US did some research to try to identify states that had similar interests to Scotland in investment, science, and research and development. That research was targeted and the Northern Ireland office followed it up. It identified 11 states because it felt that it could not cover 50 states. It decided to leave the rest to the St Patrick's day societies and the Irish-American societies. It was decided that it was important to focus on economics and specific work. Do you think that that sort of thing might be useful?

Henry McLeish: Yes. You have identified the difference we have to make between traditional Scotland and modern Scotland—which is about the hard edge of the economy—being sold abroad. For example, we negotiated technology agreements with Virginia, Maryland and California. I am not sure what has happened with those, but they were focused on some of the most

prestigious technology universities in the world. That seemed to be a wise investment in relationships and links. The tartan day initiative is well suited to a much more focused approach.

I do not think that we are talking about a huge amount of resources because this is an area in which we can encourage Westminster to be much more active in the consulates. To be fair to Westminster, I do not think that we have asked for that. We could be taking advantage of existing resources rather than spending more money.

The Convener: I want to move on to the European dimension. In the political declaration by the constitutional regions that you signed at Flanders in 2001, the comment is made that

“the political role of these regions has to be strengthened within the European Union.”

As part of that thinking, can you outline to the committee what role the Scottish Parliament should assume in scrutinising the European constitution that will be advanced by referendum in due course?

Henry McLeish: There are several areas where the Scottish Parliament could have an interest. The proposed constitution is useful, but it is not as dramatic as it has been portrayed. That is the point that I was making about the constitutional arrangements in the UK. The constitution must be about diversity and how diversity can be enhanced. It should also be about constitutional safeguards. One of the interesting things about the current global dynamic is that the EU is going to get much bigger. It is clear to me that the nation states will lose powers, which leads to questions about the roles of Bavaria, Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders. We should have a more developed role because the current constitution does not pay much regard to the new regionalism. We should be pushing harder to get more recognition that the regional—in our case national—dimension will be properly addressed.

The Convener: Should Parliament be involved in the ratification process?

Henry McLeish: At the moment it cannot be involved in the ratification process in the way that you mean.

The Convener: In this happy co-existence that we have with the Westminster Parliament—if I dare put it in those terms—would not it be a noble gesture for Westminster to involve the Scottish Parliament in scrutinising a constitution that will affect our lives?

Henry McLeish: I am sure that you did not say that with a great deal of sincerity, convener.

The Convener: My comment was redolent with sincerity.

Henry McLeish: I respond by saying that we cannot move from our current position to where the convener might want to be—and where some of us might not want to be—without giving the matter some thought. It seems to me that the constitution is a big issue that the UK Government will look after. However, it is among the issues that Scotland should consider regardless of whether it has a constitutional right to do so. There is no reason why the Parliament cannot examine issues in the constitution and comment from the Scottish perspective, although that does not mean that there will be changes made to it overnight. In the future, there may be a widening of the debate between Westminster and Edinburgh on some of the issues that we have talked about, so that you will be able to discuss them.

Mr Raffan: You say specifically in your written evidence that

“we need a much more positive and pro-active embrace of Europe.”

You are beginning to sound like Peter Mandelson. Do you share his recent criticisms? With the frustration that Mr Mandelson exhibited in an interview in the *Financial Times* today, you say:

“The Scottish Parliament and Executive should play a positive pro-Europe role in the referendum on the European constitution and, eventually, the common currency.”

You seem to be saying that if Westminster ain't doing it, we ought to.

Henry McLeish: Mandelson is pretty pro-Europe—I share that sentiment.

Mr Raffan: He has made criticisms of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has he not?

Henry McLeish: He is much better paid than I am.

I take on board the comments that Mr Mandelson made to *Le Monde*, which are covered in the *Financial Times* and *The Guardian*. He talked about the possibility of setting a date on which we would enter the euro; that does not seem to be revolutionary. He also talked about the growth of the United Kingdom economy. I have talked in pretty black terms about some of the issues in Scotland compared to that growth; therefore, in the Scottish context, Mandelson is right to say that we are not doing as well as we might.

I made the comment about embracing Europe because I feel that the anti-European perspective of the United Kingdom is running amok. After seven years of the tactics and strategy that have been adopted at Westminster, we are starting on a referendum on the European constitution and the euro, or just on Europe generally, from way behind—a lot of ground has to be made up. We need to embrace a positive view of Europe, not to

substitute it for Westminster, but to say positively that Scotland is important in Europe. We cannot have negativity running around guising as political philosophy or economic fact.

Mr Raffan: But is not—

Phil Gallie: We have heard a lot from Keith—

The Convener: Mr Gallie, Mr Raffan is speaking.

Phil Gallie: Thank you, convener. I think that it is fair to—[*Interruption.*]

The Convener: No, Mr Gallie. Mr Raffan is speaking. We will come to you later.

Mr Raffan: I hope that I can remember what I was going to ask before that interruption. I am not used to being heckled in the committee.

Is not the point that Commissioner Mandelson made that the pro-European case is the default but that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is continuing to make nit-picking points about the state of the European economies and he is banging on about the state of our economy and not making the positive case for Europe? Is not it a fact that we have to start to make that positive case? How can the Scottish Parliament do that?

The Convener: I remind members that we are pursuing an inquiry into the promotion of Scotland overseas. I ask Mr McLeish to answer that question in the context of our inquiry, after which Mr Gallie may come in.

Henry McLeish: I have made the point. I have said that I am very pro-European and think that there is a case to be made. It is interesting to hear people criticise the chancellor, but we should remember that he is probably the most impressive chancellor that we have had in the post-war period. He is also a Scot and has been a great supporter of the kind of issues that we have been talking about.

Phil Gallie: I will not pick up on that point.

The Convener: Please keep your question within the context of our inquiry, Mr Gallie.

Phil Gallie: Over the years, you have been a genuine—unswerving, I would say—advocate for devolution. Similarly, you have been honest enough about Europe today to acknowledge that we are talking about far deeper integration with Europe than many people have previously envisaged. You support that—I have no difficulty with that, although we have different opinions. However, I feel that there is some conflict within that, given the direction in which Europe is going, which as you said will mean a weakening of the Scottish voice and the UK voice, especially on international matters. I am thinking about foreign affairs and defence as linked to the constitution.

Surely, it would be right that we have a proper debate on the issues. We should not say that one side is totally against integration with Europe, while the other is totally for it; we should be trying to have constructive dialogue because it is so important to the United Kingdom and to Scotland.

Henry McLeish: I agree that there is a need for positive debate. The undercurrent of my comments is that I am not sure that we are having that debate at present, but we do have a torrent of criticism coming through.

I also agree with Phil Gallie on what is happening. First, whether we like it or not, we have a European Union of 25 states with a population of 460 million people, and there exists the possibility that those states will be joined by the Balkans, Iceland, Norway and a number of countries from the former Soviet Union that are part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Looking 10, 20 or 30 years ahead, the European Union could contain more than 30—perhaps nearly 40—countries: we cannot ignore that. Secondly, in global terms, although not in military terms compared with America, the European Union is a formidable force for good—so much so, that a similar model, the African Union, is being developed in Africa.

No matter what party we belong to, we must look at Scotland's place in an incredibly changing scene and we must not be blinkered to what could happen on any front. We must be aware of what is happening and organise ourselves strategically and infrastructurally so that we can make the right responses. There is no point in seeing devolution as the end of a journey; devolution is a process. The future is unknown, but we must be aware of the circumstances in which we are operating.

The Convener: Your essential point is that, in the ever-changing world, the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive cannot be immune to changes but must be aware of them, be part of them and, if necessary, be promoted more effectively than they are currently in the debates about such changes.

Henry McLeish: Yes, and that can be accommodated within the settlement that we have and with the general objectives and political aspirations of the United Kingdom Government. Let us have open minds and let the debate that the committee is having be generated throughout Scotland. There are not enough "what ifs" being asked about the future and much of what is being said is partisan. We are talking about the economic prospects and the welfare of our country, so it is vital that we give a boost—not a quantum leap, I say to Mr Home Robertson—financially to the idea that we matter to ourselves, that we matter to the world and that, by God, the world matters to us.

The Convener: On that note, I thank you for your appearance before the committee, Mr McLeish. It has been almost like old times for me, chairing a committee with you in front of us. It has been a pleasure to hear your evidence. I thank you for your contribution.

15:27

Meeting suspended.

15:39

On resuming—

European Union Fisheries Control Agency

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is on the paper that Alasdair Morrison has prepared on the role, remit and functions of the proposed EU fisheries control agency. The committee decided to contribute to the work that Elspeth Attwooll MEP has been doing as rapporteur to the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries. My understanding of the timescale is that she has to formulate her report by tomorrow, which is why the paper is on the agenda today. Alasdair Morrison has worked on the report with the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre. Because of illness at the end of last week, there was a delay in getting material to Alasdair Morrison for him to approve, so the paper was issued to members only earlier today. Alasdair Morrison is on other committee business elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We need to make a judgment on the contents of the paper. I remind members that we are working to somebody else's timescale and that if we want to input to Elspeth Attwooll's work, we must make a decision today.

Phil Gallie: I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on the paper, which is good. However, I have a couple of queries, and I am sorry that he is not here to answer them. Paragraph 14 mentions that the agency will lead to

"harmonisation of the management of Community fisheries",

which seems to cut away from the spirit of the regional advisory councils. I wonder whether the report should be quite as forthcoming as to welcome that.

Overall, it seems that the agency will take control of resources that nation states supply. As the report points out, our nation state probably over supplies resources compared to other states. Given that, I believe that the states' input into agency control should be equalised in some way and I would like the report to make that point, if members agree.

Mr Home Robertson: We are all in difficulties, because we received the draft report only this afternoon and it has been difficult to digest. I disagree with Phil Gallie on the harmonisation of fisheries management—it should be harmonised because the one big gripe in the fishing industry arises because of the perception that rules are enforced inequitably in different parts of Community waters. For example, the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency is tougher than its

counterparts elsewhere. Harmonisation that results in equally rigorous application of the rules in all Community waters is an important principle.

The Convener: The wording of paragraph 14 suggests that we welcome the transparency and equity that the new agency would provide, rather than the harmonisation. The harmonisation is a fact of life; it is a consequence of the common fisheries policy. I am comfortable with the point about transparency and equity, which I think is also John Home Robertson's point.

Mr Home Robertson: I want to raise another point to which I alluded in an earlier discussion on the issue and on which paragraph 5 touches: the enforcement of international conventions that cover deep waters that are adjacent to EU waters. I simply want to reiterate the importance and urgency of that enforcement because I understand that heavy uncontrolled fishing is taking place in the north-east Atlantic fishery. In deep water, fish stocks take a long time to recover if they are fished out. Under current regulations and with the current resources and authority that are available to nation states, that enforcement simply does not happen and a lot of damage is being done.

I want to underline and perhaps stiffen up the point in paragraph 5. We should mention the need for international political agreement and more effective controls, coupled with effective enforcement in those waters. That will be difficult because the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency operates only fairly small vessels that cannot be expected to operate in deep waters and high seas, which means that the work would have to be done by the Royal Navy or other naval assets.

Dennis Canavan: In general, the report is good and I go along with most of it, but I have a couple of comments. First, I hope that Phil Gallie will not be shocked when I say that I have a certain sympathy with his view about the word "harmonisation". I fear that it could be misinterpreted as our committee being in favour of centralisation rather than of the decentralised regional committee structure that we advocated in our previous report. If we left out the bit in brackets, I think that we could—

15:45

The Convener: Could we address that point just now? Are members comfortable with taking out the point in brackets, which says

"leading to harmonisation of the management of Community fisheries"?

Mr Home Robertson: So we still have equity of enforcement.

The Convener: Yes. We shall just take out that wording.

Dennis Canavan: My other point is about paragraph 32. I feel that the second sentence—although I agree with it—is rather negative, and I would prefer it to be stated in a more positive way to read something like this: “it should allow for adequate representation from the industry and from the regional advisory committees.”

The Convener: I am comfortable with that. Do other members have views on that?

Mr Home Robertson: Let us reflect on that for a second. I do not want to use a cliché, but it is a case of poachers controlling gamekeepers. Of course, they are not all poachers, but is it always appropriate to allow the industry, or the people who are subject to enforcement, to have a say in enforcement? I am not saying that Dennis Canavan’s suggestion is wrong, but I think that we should be careful about what we are saying.

The Convener: One of the central points of the debate that we have had for many years about the fishing industry is the fact that the industry has been kept at arm’s length on many issues. Some of the problems might actually be better solved if there was some co-operative dialogue and a bit of buy-in from the industry. That is certainly the sense that underpins the involvement of the fisheries organisations in the regional advisory councils.

Mr Home Robertson: I am happy to go with that, but I suggest that the appropriate body to do that would be the regional advisory committee, which includes industry people and others.

The Convener: Perhaps we could reverse the order of that sentence and say that “it should allow for input from the regional advisory committees, which include industry representatives.” That might address the issue.

Mr Home Robertson: I would be happy with that.

The Convener: Dennis, do you have any other comments?

Dennis Canavan: No.

Mr Raffan: I have a brief comment on the process before I make my points. The deadline for amendments to the report by the rapporteur, Elspeth Attwooll, is 24 or 25 November. My only concern about the report that we are considering today is that it raises a number of important issues as concerns, but in the form of questions, so we are not being absolutely clear about how we want her report amended. It is almost as if we are asking for information, rather than saying how we feel the rapporteur’s report should be amended. There are clearly a number of issues, including the ambiguity in powers, whether the agency is able to instruct member states, the deployment of military assets, different legal systems, dispute resolution and whether the agency would be cost neutral.

Important points are made in paragraphs 24 to 29 about the composition of the board, which seems to give a block vote to the European Commission. Member states might claim that they are underrepresented on the board where, as Dennis Canavan said, there will be no representation of the seven regional advisory committees. It is almost as if we are asking the rapporteur for information rather than saying how we feel her report should be amended. How can we amend, or propose amendments to, a report that we have not seen? We are being asked to amend her report although we have not actually seen what it contains.

The Convener: It is not really our business to see Elspeth Attwooll’s report. It is her report and she is rapporteur to the committee, and we have been invited to contribute to that debate. In effect, the comments that we send to Elspeth Attwooll will be in the form of the paper that is before us and she can reflect on them. If she wants to say, “I am not interested in any of your points of view,” she is obviously at liberty to do that.

On the first point that Keith Raffan raised, the paper is designed to explain a number of the issues relating to the agency, but it also provides an outline of some of our concerns. To be fair to Alasdair Morrison, he has made some pretty firm points. For example, paragraph 32 states:

“The current proposed Administrative Board set up is not satisfactory.”

That is definitely a conclusion on some of the points in the report.

Mr Raffan: We will always have lessons to learn and the situation is constantly evolving, but I wonder whether the approach that you outline would be the most effective. It is obvious that we cannot demand anything of a rapporteur, but it would be helpful if we were raising issues not in a vacuum but in the context of the rapporteur’s report. It would be useful for us to say that some of our concerns have not been answered.

I take your point, but in terms of the constructively evolving relationship between the Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament, it would be useful for us to be able to see rapporteurs’ reports—even if we did so in private—rather than simply raise concerns in terms of issues such as what we do and do not know about the proposed fisheries control agency.

Irene Oldfather: Alasdair Morrison has identified the concerns of the committee and provided input to Elspeth Attwooll in that regard. In terms of diplomacy, that is the right way to go. He has outlined the elements that we are not entirely happy with and has made it quite clear what we would like to happen. For example, he says:

"There are claims ... that, as currently worded, the Agency may be able to instruct Member States on what they can and cannot do."

The clear implication of those words is that the committee is not happy about that situation and views it as a matter of concern as it goes against the spirit of the new constitution. Elspeth Attwooll is the rapporteur and I do not think that it would be appropriate to tell her exactly what she should have in her report.

Alasdair Morrison has set out a nice compromise. He highlights areas that the committee is concerned about and suggests ways forward. It has been known for the committee to invite the committee rapporteur to meet the parliamentary rapporteur. Perhaps such a dialogue could take place between Alasdair Morrison and Elspeth Attwooll with a view to informing the final report on behalf of the committee. That dialogue would take place in private and the committee would be able to see the report at the end of the process. That would be a way of influencing the process using the correct diplomatic channels.

I am happy with the report, if the one or two suggested amendments are made.

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): I agree with Keith Raffan. It is not our report and we are not seeking to amend Elspeth Attwooll's report. All that we are doing is saying that we have read her report and are offering some intelligent markers that she might want to take into account. I suspect that she has thought of lots of them, but I am sure that there are one or two that she will not have thought of. We are giving her a bit of assistance, nothing more. In that sense, I think that our approach is a good one and that Alasdair Morrison has thought of lots of things to say.

The Convener: The process points that we have discussed are on the record and we can reflect on them in relation to further issues. Although time has not been on our side in relation to any of the work connected to this matter, Alasdair Morrison has prepared a helpful report.

To summarise, in paragraph 5, we want to strengthen the point that John Home Robertson made on the extent of the agency's role in relation to non-EU waters. In paragraph 14, we will delete the section in brackets. Further, we will rewrite paragraph 32 so that it says something like, "The current proposed administrative board set-up is not satisfactory. It should allow for input from the regional advisory committees that include industry representation from the fisheries organisations." That should capture the point that Dennis Canavan made. We will also strengthen the part that deals with the work load of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency. The report makes the point that that organisation is pretty much at

full capacity and that it would be difficult for it to enforce any additional responsibilities that it had to undertake. That point is well made.

Convener's Report

15:54

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is the convener's report, which sets out three points. First, there is a letter from the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care on the Food Standards Agency's proposals to implement EC regulation 178/200, which concerns food law and establishing an EU food agency. Do members wish to raise issues relating to the letter, which has also gone to the convener of the Health Committee and the convener of the Subordinate Legislation Committee? It is pretty straightforward.

Phil Gallie: I cannot remember what the points of conflict were, but there were concerns about the Feeding Stuffs (Safety Requirements for Feed for Food-Producing Animals) Regulations 2004. I note that the letter has not gone to the Environment and Rural Development Committee. Is there anything that we can do about that?

The Convener: The letter has come to us from the point of view of ensuring that the right people see the legislation. I am happy to forward it to the convener of the Environment and Rural Development Committee so that the committee can decide what action it requires to take.

Secondly, as I have told the committee, I am anxious to draw the inquiry on the promotion of Scotland overseas to a conclusion as early in the new year as possible. I suspect that we will be able to be clear of it by the end of January, which raises issues about the committee's work plan for the year ahead. The proposal in the report is that we have a committee away day on either 14 January or 24 January to discuss our work plan. Glasgow City Council has kindly agreed to host that event at our convenience. I will get the clerks to talk to members individually to decide on a date for the diary. I ask for prompt responses, because although it is reasonably far away, we have other commitments. The dates are also into Burns season. I think that we come back from recess on 10 January. Members should advise the clerks of their availability immediately afterwards. Although members might express a preference, I hope that they will be able to change their commitments to come on the preferred date.

The third point is that the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development has expressed its intention to visit Scotland in the spring of 2005. I ask members to agree to invite the committee to visit and to put in place the usual arrangements.

Mr Raffan: I know that other committees are following that routine. It would be nice if we offered hospitality, such as dinner in the members'

restaurant. Now that we have those facilities, it is important that we use them. It would be helpful to talk to members of the committee informally as well as formally.

The Convener: Is the committee agreed on that point?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Pre and Post-council Scrutiny

15:58

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is consideration of a paper on pre and post-council scrutiny. I refer members to the main table in annex A to the paper. Do members wish to comment on the points raised?

Mr Raffan: The committee might wish to reconsider at its away day whether to recommence with its idea of commissioning research into Scotland's performance relative to the Lisbon targets, rather than making a rushed decision now. Depending on our forward programme for next year, there might be other issues on which we wish to commission research. I will raise other issues on the EU drugs action plan with the clerks, because they are relatively minor.

Irene Oldfather: I agree with Keith Raffan. During the away day we will consider our programme, of which commissioning research will be a part. I endorse Keith Raffan's view.

Mr Home Robertson: I seem to be coming out with fish this afternoon.

With regard to the economic and financial affairs council, I see on page 18 of the briefing paper that a certain amount of European taxpayers' money is being spent on getting access for European fishing fleets to various African and other waters. Given that there is a reference to

"French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and British vessels",

I would be interested to know whether that would be of any use to people from the Scottish fleet.

The Convener: Some weeks ago, I saw a news piece on the BBC about a fishing vessel from either Peterhead or Buckie that was fishing off the Namibian coast. We will certainly ask the clerks to investigate that matter.

Mr Home Robertson: The paper mentions fishing in Mauritius—now there's a thought.

Phil Gallie: The agenda of the justice and home affairs council looks very impressive on first reading. However, only two items will make it on to the final agenda for discussion, which means that the other 22 or so items that are mentioned will not be discussed. That makes me wonder about the value of that section of the briefing paper.

My second point may be slightly more controversial for this committee. In relation to employment and social policy, the paper says:

"the EU requires extra effort to meet its target of 70% employment by 2010".

The council appears to be very concerned that we

do not have the resources to meet our employment requirements and has made suggestions about changing immigration law to allow people from other countries to be recruited. However, there also appears to be a massive surplus of labour in the EU. Given that EU citizens can move freely between EU countries, I wonder why it is finding it difficult to meet its target.

The Convener: That major issue fits in with Keith Raffan's point about the significance of this area of inquiry. The European Commission will focus on issues of competitiveness, and mobility of labour will be central to that debate. Perhaps we can investigate the matter and ensure that it forms part of our discussions at the away day in January.

Irene Oldfather: In the past, we have given some attention to pre-council reports. However, based on the information that we receive in those reports, we often discuss certain issues in committee that in the end do not reach the agenda. It might well be that information about whether a particular matter has made it on to the agenda emerges in the post-council reports. We sometimes spend an awful lot of time on sending letters to ministers about issues that are raised in pre-council reports but which never reach the agenda. Perhaps at the away day we could examine how we can improve our targeting instead of spending time on issues that never see the light of day.

Mr Raffan: I endorse that point. It would be worth spending some time at the away day on committee processes.

I want briefly to raise a few points about this part of the agenda. First, it would be useful to see the Kok report, called "Facing the challenge: The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment", before our away day. Secondly, the paper refers to two recent European Court of Justice cases that affect residential on-call working time. I recall that those cases have been raised before because of their implications for the health service, but I am not quite sure where we stand on that matter.

Thirdly, I wish to highlight the proposal for amending the directive on nutrition labelling, which will seek to make full nutrition labelling mandatory on all pre-packaged foods. That is very important, health-wise.

Finally, under the heading "Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Training", the paper says:

"UK Health Departments are working on a UK basis to develop a flu pandemic plan ... A version for Scotland's particular circumstances will also be produced."

That is important.

At this point, I should also repeat my earlier reference to the new EU drugs action plan.

Phil Gallie: I have a point of clarification on the ECOFIN section of the paper. Perhaps this is an argument for tomorrow rather than today, but one of our discussions about membership of the euro has centred on the premise that that will not necessarily mean that taxation will be harmonised. In that regard, I note that Andorra has applied to come into the euro zone, but that

"Negotiations will be suspended if Andorra has not ratified agreement on taxation of income from savings".

I would be happy to hear a slight explanation of that from the ministers involved. Any information would be useful, because it seems to me that the issue of harmonisation is tomorrow's argument.

The Convener: I am afraid that the specific point that you raised on ECOFIN is—

Phil Gallie: It is under "items approved without debate".

The Convener: Sorry—we can certainly seek clarification on that point.

As I said to some members beforehand, one of my reflections on this section of the committee's business is that I think that we tend to focus on issues when the stable door has been kicked open by the horse, which is galloping off while we try to get on its back to slow it down. Notwithstanding the importance of scrutinising legislation as it comes in from the EU, it might be more valuable to be involved at a much earlier stage and to have a commanding understanding of the European Commission's policy agenda so that we can make whatever recommendations and representations that we want to the Executive and, if necessary, to the UK Government to try to redirect the policy agenda, instead of trying to intervene at a late stage when it has all gone pear-shaped. That issue could obviously crop up at the away day.

Irene Oldfather: Now is a good time to be doing that, despite what Phil Gallie thinks about the new constitution. To my mind, the new constitution's protocols give a role to regional Governments and Parliaments to become involved in the policy-making process. The Committee of the Regions, Regleg and other organisations will look at how regions can influence the policy agenda upstream early on. I hope that that will provide us with a vehicle for taking forward our concerns. The difficulty in the past was intelligence gathering in terms of having someone in Brussels who could tell us well before things were at the development stage what would be coming on to the agenda and how much would be relevant to what we do in Scotland.

It would be useful if we could fine tune the intelligence gathering and use the vehicle of the new constitution's additional protocols. Regional Governments across Europe are determined to

have a bigger role in shaping policy before it gets to the draft stage. There are vehicles that we will be able to use in the months ahead and it is important that the committee taps into that—I am very much in favour of doing so.

Mr Raffan: I do not dissent from that view. There is an argument for the Parliament having its own representative in Brussels to help us with that. I agree with what the convener said, but the problem is our fortnightly cycle of meetings, which may not necessarily dovetail with the pre-council reports. The reports vary in quality—some are substantial and, of course, some are non-existent. For example, the table in annex A shows that, for the pre-council ECOFIN report for 7 December, we are

"Awaiting information from the Scottish Executive."

The same entry appears under the heading "Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council, 9 December". That is the problem.

The Convener: The issue is largely about how aware the European and External Relations Committee, the Parliament and the Executive are of issues that are on the horizon. My concern is that, once an issue reaches a council agenda, it is largely all over and done with. I do not think that the fortnightly cycle of our meetings affects the issues too much. It is about being involved in an issue 18 months beforehand, seeing where the thinking is going and ensuring that everybody in Scotland is connected to some of the issues.

My final point in relation to the pre and post-council scrutiny report is the letter from the Minister for Justice on the issues that we raised on the justice and home affairs council. I am a little bit bewildered by the second-last paragraph of the minister's letter, which indicates that the fresh talent initiative and all the rest of it is absolutely hunky-dory within the asylum and immigration agenda, when immigration in terms of restrictions on people coming into the EU is a live political issue. I do not understand where the minister is coming from on that, but I am sure that we can chew over the issue when we have further discussions on how to handle such issues.

Mr Raffan: Since the convener has raised the issue, let me suggest that, despite Irene Oldfather's earlier remarks, it might be worth our asking the minister to amplify her remarks rather than simply let the issue disappear into the ether.

The Convener: I am happy to write to her again. There is perhaps a strain of thinking within some aspects of the justice and home affairs council that might contradict the aspirations of the excellent fresh talent initiative, which I am anxious to ensure is not obstructed.

Mr Home Robertson: The reply on biofuels, which is also attached, contains rather better news than I had expected. It reveals that 20 outlets across Scotland sell biodiesel and that the nation's first large-scale biodiesel production unit is under construction near Motherwell. That is interesting. I did not know about that.

The Convener: That should be an interesting place to visit on a spare Friday afternoon.

Mr Home Robertson: I had a nasty feeling that Scotland might be trailing behind on the issue, but it seems that we are leading.

Sift

16:11

The Convener: Agenda item 6 is the sift paper. Have members any points that they wish to raise?

Mr Raffan: I could probably look this up, but I would be grateful if the clerks could provide more details on "A Coherent European Policy Framework for External Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis", which is mentioned on page 5 of paper EU/S2/04/19/6. The issue is relevant to the committee's external relations role. Also, the Parliament had a good debate on Scotland's contribution to international developments just a couple of days before the official opening ceremony. The issue is also relevant in view of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation that will go to Africa in February, so I would be grateful to see further details.

The Convener: The clerks will deal with your request in due course.

If there are no further points on the sift paper, we will move to agenda item 7, which the committee agreed to take in private. I ask members of the public to leave us while we resolve the issue.

16:12

Meeting continued in private until 16:15.

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