

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 October 2005

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

15th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)

*Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

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

*Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

*Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

*Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con)

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Alasdair Rankin

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 25 October 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:01*]

Interests

The Convener (Linda Fabiani): I welcome everyone to the European and External Relations Committee's 15th meeting this year. I have apologies from Phil Gallie, who is attending a meeting of the Edinburgh Tram (Line One) Bill Committee, so I welcome again Derek Brownlee, who is Phil Gallie's substitute.

Dennis Canavan will have to leave to attend a Parliamentary Bureau meeting at half past 2 so, with the committee's indulgence, we will consider the paper that he submitted first under the work programme agenda item.

For item 1, I welcome Charlie Gordon to the committee. As usual, I invite him to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's work.

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I have only one interest to declare: I am a non-executive director of Hampden Park Ltd. That is a non-remunerated, non-pecuniary interest.

Item in Private

14:02

The Convener: Item 2 is a decision by the committee on whether to take item 7 in private. Item 7 is the draft of the committee's fresh talent inquiry report, which we carried over from the previous meeting. Do members agree to consider it in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Work Programme

14:02

The Convener: We will now consider the committee's work programme. Before I make general comments and open up the subject for discussion, I would like to hear from Dennis Canavan about the paper on a reporter's inquiry that he has submitted for consideration.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Members may recall that at a previous meeting or at previous meetings, I suggested that the committee should undertake an inquiry into the potential for bilateral co-operation between Scotland and Ireland. I would prefer that to be a full inquiry, but if the committee felt for various reasons that it did not have the time to devote to a full inquiry, I would be willing to volunteer my services as a reporter—or rapporteur—to conduct a reporter-led inquiry, with the committee's approval.

The reasons for my proposal are summarised in annex D to paper EU/S2/05/15/1. I will run through them briefly. Ireland is one of Scotland's closest neighbours. Over the centuries, migration has taken place in both directions. The result is strong and historical links between the two countries. As a consequence, the scope is considerable for bilateral co-operation projects on matters such as cultural exchange, tourism, sport, education and transport. I suggest that they would have huge economic and social benefits for both countries.

In some cases, an additional bonus might be European Union funding. The Republic of Ireland has more experience and certainly more expertise than we have in tapping into funds such as Interreg. For many years, Interreg projects have taken place between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, because they involve two member states of the European Union. Interreg projects have also involved the Republic of Ireland and Wales. However, I know of no Interreg-funded project that has involved Scotland and Ireland.

Although Interreg is due to finish at the end of next year, the European Commission proposes to replace it with a new co-operation objective, which will contain two strands: cross-border co-operation and transnational co-operation. For cross-border co-operation initiatives, the Commission proposes to stipulate a maximum distance of 150km between the two relevant coastlines. That means that part of the Scottish coastline will qualify, as the distance between parts of Scotland's west coast and Donegal in the Republic of Ireland's north-western tip is less than 150km. Therefore, places such as Argyll, the Western Isles, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway might be

able to access European Union funding under the new co-operation objective.

I know for a fact that contacts on the matter have already been established between the Scottish Executive and people in Ireland, because I was instrumental in setting those up. Representatives of Donegal-based Inishowen Rural Development Limited and of the Irish central border area network—a cross-border body—have already held a preliminary meeting with the Scottish Executive at ministerial level. I know that those people are keen to take the proposal forward by means of a partnership.

I am also aware that the chairperson of an influential committee of the Dáil—the Parliament of the Republic of Ireland—has expressed an interest in the proposal. If the committee approves my idea, there might be some advantage to arranging a future meeting between representatives of our committee and members of the appropriate committee or committees of the Dáil. Although the devolved governmental institutions in Northern Ireland are currently in suspension, there are grounds for hoping that suspension will soon be lifted. That will allow scope for input from the parliamentarians and Administrations in all three areas: Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

As I said, if the committee feels that time constraints prevent us from carrying out a full inquiry at this stage, an initial reporter-led inquiry would help not only to inform our committee and Parliament but to prompt the Executive to support a proposal that will be of great advantage to both parts of Ireland as well as to Scotland.

The Convener: Before I open up the discussion to other members, I want to ask about the preliminary meeting with the Executive that you mentioned. What resulted from that preliminary meeting and what progress has been made?

Dennis Canavan: Nothing has resulted from the meeting as yet. It was held just a few weeks ago.

The Convener: So it took place very recently.

Dennis Canavan: Yes. Nothing concrete has materialised as yet, but the meeting was very constructive. I hope that some form of partnership will result from it.

The Convener: Do other members have any questions for Dennis Canavan?

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Dennis Canavan has suggested an excellent idea, which we should pursue. Given that the next meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body will be held in Scotland—it takes place at the end of November, but I do not have the exact dates in my brain—it might be useful for the committee to ask Dennis Canavan to attend that meeting. We could

seek permission for that from the relevant people and ask Alison Dickie, who is the clerk responsible, to facilitate that. Dennis Canavan would find the BIIPB meeting helpful, especially as people from the Dáil and elsewhere will be present.

The Convener: That is a good suggestion.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

Dennis Canavan has suggested a good proposal that would be an interesting committee inquiry. I almost hesitate to say this, but I suggest that we should expand the proposal a little and develop the idea a bit more. I know that Dennis Canavan is particularly interested in cross-border co-operation with Ireland but, having checked, I am aware that Scotland has had a number of Interreg transnational co-operation projects. Analysing the projects in which Scotland has been involved might well inform and assist the inquiry. I wonder whether Dennis is willing to consider a slight expansion to his proposal, to allow us to consider the transnational element of Interreg. If we consider the new project and programme timescales, I wonder whether we might be able to develop the transnational element as well as the cross-border element. The more money we can bring into Scotland, and the more projects we can develop, the better.

The Convener: Perhaps we could do things in tandem. If Dennis starts to put together his programme, the committee could at the same time make its own inquiries with the Executive and other interested and relevant parties into what work has been done previously. That might be better than putting everything into the one remit.

Irene Oldfather: We are entirely in Dennis's hands. I know that he carried out a good and substantial inquiry for us before, but it was a lot of work. I think that it would be nice if we considered Interreg as a whole, but Dennis might feel that that is too much.

Dennis Canavan: As I say, Interreg will end at the end of next year and be replaced by the new co-operation objective with the two strands—cross-border and transnational. I suggest that the priority should be the cross-border strand, but it may well be that we could build on that and consider the transnational strand in future as well.

The Convener: Thank you, Dennis. You will be coming back to the meeting, unless the Parliamentary Bureau meeting goes on for hours and hours, and we will come to the recommendations on this proposal after we have gone through our paper on the work programme.

Having heard from Dennis, we will now go back to the beginning of this agenda item and give general consideration to the committee's work programme. I know that all members will have read the paper carefully.

I will say a few words of introduction before opening up the meeting for discussion. At our previous meeting, we considered our options and asked the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre to provide further details on specific inquiry proposals. I thank all the staff for the very useful papers that we received. We have also had additional information from Dennis Canavan on his proposal for a reporter-led inquiry, and from Jim Wallace on his proposal. I thank Margaret Ewing for giving us additional information that is relevant to Jim Wallace's proposal.

An additional proposal appears on the latest draft of our paper. It was prompted by Irene Oldfather's suggestion that the committee should consider the European Commission's communication strategy. Members will have read that proposal. It focuses on what the Commission has called plan D—D for democracy, dialogue and debate. The plan was launched on 13 October as a contribution to the period of reflection following the no votes in the French and Dutch referenda on the constitutional treaty. Plan D will be followed by a white paper next year. Annex C of our paper lays out the background and the objectives for an inquiry.

The final section of annex C describes the Scottish Executive-led building a bridge between Europe and its citizens project. That project was also launched on 13 October and it seems to me to be complementary to the Commission's plan D. It is intended to be a contribution to the period of reflection and considers how some of the best features of our legislative process might serve as examples of good practice in the European Union. It includes ways in which the Parliament has engaged with citizens. An inquiry into plan D, or a more widely drawn inquiry into the area of communication, would take that Scottish Executive-led project into account, I presume.

We come to the Lisbon inquiry. Members might have other thoughts, but my view—after reading all the papers—is that before we take on a Lisbon strategy subject, it would be better for us to wait until we see the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report on its inquiry into business growth, which will come out in the new year.

The situation is similar with the services directive option, which is currently at the European Parliament. I understand that there are 1,500 amendments to that directive, which suggests that we will not see its final shape until early in the new year—I may be being optimistic.

There is also a proposal for an inquiry into globalscot and similar networks. I detected at our previous meeting that the committee felt that it had covered much of that ground in its report earlier this year on its inquiry into the promotion of Scotland worldwide.

For a full committee inquiry, it seems to me that there remain only two issues on which we could make a fairly prompt start and in which new things are happening. The first of those is structural funds and, in particular, the mechanisms and timing for the distribution of such funds in future. That could be the subject of a fairly short inquiry. The second issue is communication, which is extremely important. Obviously, we will need to keep everything under review over the next 18 months, regardless of which subject we decide on for our inquiry. With those remarks, I open up the discussion for members' comments.

14:15

Irene Oldfather: I am happy to start off, but there is no particular order to my comments.

I agree with much of what the convener said. If we had to choose between a full inquiry into plan D—which stands for democracy, dialogue and debate—and a full inquiry into structural funds, my preference would be for plan D. From recent visits to Europe and from discussions across member states, I get the sense that people are agreed on the need for a period of reflection but are asking what we will do during that time. We need more than just a vague space, so we need to consider what a period of reflection actually means.

We could take the issue forward by considering how we can make Europe work for citizens and by finding out what citizens want from Europe. I am keen to look into that issue a bit further. We could use the committee inquiry as an opportunity to ask civic Scotland and Scotland's voluntary sector what they are looking for from this period of reflection and how we can make Europe work.

Although people can see all the advantages to Europe—the competitiveness agenda, the jobs and so on—they get frustrated when they see silly things happening in their communities. People feel that the European Commission is not listening to them on some issues. If we could take on board some of those concerns, we could make the inquiry relevant. The inquiry could also tap into Jim Wallace's proposal that we look at better regulation, but it would cover a much wider area.

It would be useful for the committee to take time to think through the European Commission's proposals, particularly as the Commission is keen to engage with regional Governments and regional Parliaments at this point. As the Commission is about to publish a white paper, such an inquiry would provide us with an opportunity to prepare a considered response to that.

In addition, the Scottish Executive is undertaking work in this area that we should scrutinise. It would be appropriate for us to become a bit better informed by using our time to consider what plan D means in those areas.

My concern about an inquiry into structural funds is that nothing is happening with structural funds at the moment because, as we discussed at our previous meeting, people are still entrenched in their different camps. Certainly, the United Kingdom Government has said that it will deal with structural funds towards the end of its presidency—that might mean December if we are optimistic—but it would be difficult for us to take evidence, agree a report and conclude an inquiry within a timescale that might be relevant. If we are unable to influence those discussions, I wonder whether we might not be better to await the decisions on the final proposals.

It is suggested that any inquiry into structural funds might look more at the structures than anything else. The committee paper contains a lot of information about structures and the sort of shape that they might take under future programme initiatives. However, instead of trying to push something through before December, we might find it easier to consider those issues once we know what the financial perspective and budget will look like.

Those are my thoughts on the key areas that have been identified as issues that could be the subject of a full committee inquiry.

The Convener: Do other members have any views? I will try to sweep up all the comments at the end.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I go along with what Irene Oldfather said. I am not sure that there is a lot to be gained from having another go at structural funds. We have been there before.

I agree that plan D—an unfortunate title—is an important issue, but it will be difficult to have a focused inquiry on it. If we raise something as fundamental as that, we run the risk that every nutter in Scotland will come peddling their Euro-conspiracy theories.

The Convener: Would that be in addition to the nutters in this committee?

Mr Home Robertson: Speak for yourself, convener. I apologise—members know what I mean. We would need to ensure that there was a tight focus and that we tried to keep to a positive and constructive way forward to attempt to re-engage the people with the European Community.

In her introductory comments, the convener mentioned globalscot and similar networks. I reflected on that option again when I read the paper. We have conducted a major inquiry on promoting Scotland worldwide, which was a big job, and it is clear that that issue needs to be reflected on more, but the option in the paper concerns the narrower issue of connecting with

the Scottish diaspora, which we will need to find a way of doing soon. Leaving alone what is happening in Scotland at the moment, there are many people in different parts of the world who probably do not even know that they are Scots, and connecting with those people and energising their potential could be worth a lot to Scotland. I do not know whether it is worth giving that option further thought. We could so in the future if not immediately.

The Convener: I will make a couple of points before I bring in Margaret Ewing.

John Home Robertson is right. An inquiry into plan D would have to be fairly focused because the Commission is looking for input to its consultation by April next year, if I remember rightly. The Executive will publish its conclusions on its building a bridge project in autumn next year. We could consider those projects together and find out how one is complementing the other, but the timetable would have to be fairly tight if a submission to the Commission is needed by April.

I do not think that anyone wants a full inquiry on structural funds. Work would complement the work that the committee has already done on the issue. An inquiry would have to be very short and tight and would have to focus on the Executive's plans to implement the new way of distributing structural funds and co-operation funding. The Executive has been carrying out research and it might be worth while to have the minister along to the committee to tell us how that work is proceeding. The committee could then decide to take complementary evidence on what the minister had said, perhaps over the following couple of meetings. It could then form an opinion to relay to the Executive.

Mrs Ewing: The convener has said many of the things that I was going to say about structural funds. For a variety of reasons, all committee members have an interest in structural funds. People best understand about Europe what it delivers into Scotland and they look for what it is delivering into Scotland. An inquiry into that would be much more focused than an inquiry into plan D.

The paper mentions the introduction of co-financing to distribute structural funds and the concentration of funds in south, west and east Scotland, but there is nothing about north of the Tay as far as I can see. We could produce a short report on the funds and perhaps invite the minister and his advisers to the committee to give more details for an inquiry, as they are already planning for potential future programmes. I would like to know what those programmes are and how they will work out. That could be a very effective short assessment or task for the committee.

I am not wild about an inquiry on plan D because I suspect that civic Scotland and the

voluntary sector will simply come along and say to us that they want more money from Europe. Everybody wants their project to be sponsored in one way or another by some European fund. John Home Robertson made the point effectively that a very tight focus would be needed. An inquiry would have to be tied into a particular issue that we wish to raise about Scotland and Europe and we should avoid using vague words. So many vague words come out of Europe that people lose interest in what it is doing—it seems vague and removed from the realities of everyday life.

If we are going to opt for a major inquiry—I have not heard from Jim Wallace yet about whether he is proposing a reporter-led inquiry—I think that the implementation of directives should be given very serious consideration by the committee. The EU-related complaints that we all receive from constituents, in particular from people running small and medium-sized businesses, tend to be about that.

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): I agree with much of what Margaret Ewing has just said. A consensus seems to be emerging. My concern about doing any substantive investigative inquiry into structural funds is that the situation that we would be investigating is still hypothetical. To embark on an inquiry into something that is hypothetical is problematic. We might end up going down one road but then find that the whole hypothesis has moved. Nevertheless, it would be worth while asking the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform to come before us and to get an update from him about where he believes we are, where the UK Government is or where the Commission and Council of the EU are with the development of what happens after December 2006.

The options paper also asks about any provisional plans that are being made. There is a forum that is working in this area, and we might wish to invite members of that forum to come along, possibly on the back of what the minister says, rather than ahead of that. The inquiry should of course have a European focus. Plan D sounds like the fourth attempt at something.

Mr Home Robertson: D for desperation.

Mr Wallace: Nevertheless, it offers us an opportunity. I agree with what Irene Oldfather and others have said: our inquiry must be focused. Otherwise, it might be so rambling that it will not achieve anything. It would still be good to link it with the Executive's building a bridge project. It would be worth trying to marry the two things.

I thank Margaret Ewing for her note to me about better regulation. I returned to my office only late yesterday, however. I also received a note from Harry MacMillan of BP Scotland, relating to a

problem that has been encountered at Grangemouth with some directive. I will give the clerk that note. Mr MacMillan was suggesting that it might be worth looking into the matter. There are a number of options. Irene Oldfather has just mentioned another one to me. When I was a minister, I went on a visit to Irene's constituency—we cannot quite remember which directive it was that we were addressing, although we both remember the occasion.

The Convener: It was obviously riveting.

Mr Wallace: It was, actually. There are a number of possible areas to explore. I do not know how you would like me to proceed, convener. Should I follow Dennis Canavan's approach and prepare a paper?

The Convener: What are your views? How would you prefer to proceed? In the end, we could sum up on the various recommendations and then decide what to do. Having looked into the matter more deeply in preparation for your paper, which turned out to be quite a few pages long—

Mr Wallace: Thanks to the clerks.

The Convener: Now that you have started to look into the matter, do you think that it would warrant more investigation and that there could be a reporter-led inquiry on it?

Mr Wallace: Yes. I think that there is something there.

The Convener: Were you gesticulating there, Derek?

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): No, I was just—

Mr Home Robertson: Getting animated.

Derek Brownlee: Although perhaps less so than the usual occupant of this chair. I am pretty much with Margaret Ewing on this. The structural funds issue is crucial, but we need to get the timing right.

I note the irony in the European Commission launching its plan D on Margaret Thatcher's 80th birthday.

Mr Wallace: It is rather sad that Derek Brownlee knows that.

Derek Brownlee: I was not invited. I was very disappointed.

Mr Home Robertson: Not a true believer?

Derek Brownlee: Absolutely—well, just like David Cameron. The plan D thing seems very woolly.

Margaret Ewing was right about the complaints that we receive. It would not be true to say that we get them daily, but the more substantive

complaints that we get are about the way in which policies emanating from Europe are implemented. That is where Jim Wallace's proposed subject is much more relevant. We could probably have a much more focused and beneficial inquiry into his area. Plan D does not really grab me. Perhaps it speaks to other people.

Mr Home Robertson: I bet that it would grab Phil Gallie.

Mrs Ewing: I think that he would be going for Jim Wallace's proposal.

Derek Brownlee: I think that there is more substance to Jim Wallace's proposal, anyway.

The Convener: Are members happy for me to try to put something together on the basis of this discussion?

14:30

Irene Oldfather: I did not mention Jim Wallace's proposal, which is very good, because I had assumed from the discussions that we had at our previous meeting that Jim was happy to take the matter on board as a rapporteur and was well on his way to doing so. I thought that we had more or less agreed to such an inquiry.

The better regulation agenda is vital. However, it is also important that as regional Parliaments we respond to Commission initiatives on what is wrong with Europe. Part of the communication strategy will be for the Commission to ask us what we think is wrong with Europe. I hope that Jim Wallace will produce a good analysis that will allow us to respond to the Commission's questions about where we are going wrong. It is not just about communications and getting the message across; it is also about delivering better. I would have thought that we would be able to say that.

I am fairly sure that regional Governments, the Committee of the Regions and the group of regions with legislative power will want to have input into the communication strategy, which will have a major impact across all member states. It would be remiss of the committee to miss an opportunity to do that. To have an input, we will have to take some evidence and to carry out analysis. We may say that communication is one strand, but the other is getting things right on the ground. We may have good examples of that to provide from the inquiry into better regulation that Jim Wallace is planning to conduct. The committee may want to undertake the inquiry alongside Jim or to support it. It is for him to decide how he wants to take forward the inquiry.

Across Europe, regional Parliaments and Governments are talking about having a period of reflection, but what does that mean? I guess that there will be divisions along party lines. For

example, the Conservatives would like the issue to die away and for us to forget about it. They say that the constitution is dead in the water, and that should be it. However, if we are realistic, that is not going to happen. We need to think about where we will go from here and what we will do. Will we salvage bits and pieces that concern the role of regional Governments in policy making and the liaison between regional Governments, regional Parliaments and the Commission, to improve the delivery and implementation of services on the ground? The constitution may not come back in the form that was proposed previously, but communication and reflection are partly about considering where we go from here. An institution such as the Scottish Parliament should contribute to that debate.

The Convener: Before I go through the recommendations, I want to ensure that we have reached agreement and got everything right. Would Charlie Gordon like to comment on anything that he has heard?

Mr Gordon: Any differences in the discussion that we have had thus far have been differences of emphasis. There is plenty of scope for consensus.

Mrs Ewing: I am slightly concerned about some of Irene Oldfather's comments. I accept that views on the constitution will reflect party-political boundaries, but there will also be disputes within parties. We must be very careful when putting together a report that reflects a consensus on one committee of the Scottish Parliament.

I was not sure whether Irene Oldfather was suggesting that we make Jim Wallace's work the main focus of work on plan D or whether she was suggesting that we need to consider other aspects. Many organisations and people are already working away in the European Commission and elsewhere. Will we consider the possibility of setting up another structure? People have a vision of Europe as a complex, bureaucratic system; that is one of the things that they particularly dislike about it. We need to be careful about extending any inquiry beyond a specific target and expressing political viewpoints on how Europe should proceed, unless we can get consensus around the table. I do not know what Derek Brownlee's views are, because I do not know him well enough, but I can imagine what Phil Gallie's views would be. How will we get a consensus in the committee?

The Convener: We should consider the recommendations in the paper, and I will give you my impressions on how I feel the committee is moving forward on this matter. Charlie Gordon is quite right to say that any disagreements are at the margins rather than with the substance.

The first recommendation concerns the distribution of structural funds. Members seem reluctant to have another full inquiry into structural funds; however, concerns have been expressed about differences in the way in which structural funds will be administered. From members' comments, I think that one way forward would be to invite the minister to give evidence on how he sees—or she sees—

I cannot remember who the minister is.

Alasdair Rankin (Clerk): It is Allan Wilson.

The Convener: Oh, it's a he.

We could invite Allan Wilson to give evidence on how he thinks the Executive will proceed on the matter. We might find it useful to take evidence from a couple of specific witnesses and then to write to the Executive expressing a general committee view. That would not constitute a full-blown inquiry and might take only two meetings. Is that acceptable to members?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The second recommendation concerns the Lisbon strategy. I said earlier that it seems sensible to wait for the outcome of the Enterprise and Culture Committee's very full inquiry into business growth in Scotland and then to concentrate on one relevant aspect of its report. I do not think that anyone disagreed with that suggestion. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The third recommendation concerns the services directive. Because of the late legislative stage that the directive has reached, we should monitor its progress in Europe and then examine what impact the final result will have on aspects of Scottish life.

Irene Oldfather: I forgot to mention that point myself, but your comment is important. I agree that this is not the right time for a full inquiry on the services directive; however, we must consider closely its implications when its final shape emerges.

The Convener: So that is acceptable.

On the fourth recommendation, which concerns the European Commission's plan D, I have picked up members' reluctance to have a long, woolly inquiry on the matter. I said earlier that we must be fairly tight with this issue because of the time that we have to respond to the consultation. It has been recognised that the issue should be examined in tandem with the Executive's building a bridge strategy. In any case, everyone appears to agree with John Home Robertson that any inquiry into the matter must be focused and we should approach people who would give us the best and most relevant input. As a result, I suggest

that, for the next meeting, the clerks put together a detailed focus paper on how such an inquiry could proceed. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I think that I am right in saying that Irene Oldfather was not suggesting that that inquiry should be taken alongside Jim Wallace's proposal.

Irene Oldfather: The two issues are separate, but I hope—

Mr Home Robertson: Would it be reasonable to synchronise them? After all, stuff that comes out of the inquiry that Jim Wallace has proposed could well be highly relevant to what we want to say about delta plan.

Irene Oldfather: Oh, delta plan. I like that.

The Convener: Members are going to go on for a long time about these Ds. I can hear you all now.

Before we consider Jim Wallace's proposal, John Home Robertson has stated that, in retrospect, he has a general interest in what is happening with globalscot and so on. I suggest that we keep the matter on the agenda and revisit it later.

Irene Oldfather: Perhaps John Home Robertson would like to be a rapporteur on the issue.

Mr Home Robertson: That job would be too big.

The Convener: We will obviously track the issues that are being raised in future work programmes.

That brings us to what has been billed in the committee inquiries paper as "Reporter-led inquiries". Members appear to feel that Jim Wallace's proposed inquiry would warrant the use of more than one rapporteur.

Irene Oldfather: How does Jim Wallace feel about that?

The Convener: He has already said that he is happy with that.

Mr Wallace: I am entirely at the committee's disposal and will happily go along with whatever it suggests. If the committee feels that it should be reporter-led, I am happy to be the reporter on it; if members feel that it should be wider, that is fine.

The Convener: I am worried about the inquiry becoming too technical and about getting terribly bogged down. We should focus tightly. Such an inquiry would of course complement the plan D inquiry. If the committee is happy, I will suggest to the clerks that they consider how we can move beyond a rapporteur-led inquiry on the matter.

Irene Oldfather: Could Jim take the lead and regularly bring information back to the committee? There could be technical elements, and progress might be much quicker if we have one person talking to a Commission department, as opposed to our waiting for Commission officials to find a date in their diaries when they can come to Scotland. We may be dealing with two or three directives each of which is technical in its own right, and one person may be best placed to focus on the issues.

The Convener: I suggest that Jim Wallace, Alasdair Rankin and I get together to talk about how we can make progress.

Mr Home Robertson: I suspect that we will find ourselves dealing with many of our queries by correspondence. Any number of websites will have a huge list of anecdotes about wicked things that are supposed to have been perpetrated by the European Union, and three quarters of them will be complete myths. This could be a good opportunity to sift some of them out. We should focus on the genuine issues and base our inquiry on those. That would be worth while.

The Convener: That brings us to the last of the recommendations in our paper, which is Dennis Canavan's proposal. Dennis has said that he would be keen for his proposal to go beyond being rapporteur-led. Do members have any views?

That silence suggests to me that the committee feels that it should be a rapporteur-led issue.

Mrs Ewing: Could you remember to ensure that Dennis is invited to the BIIPB?

The Convener: Yes, I took a note of that. It was an excellent suggestion that we seek to have Dennis invited to the—was it the Scottish-Irish council?

Mrs Ewing: The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

The Convener: Oh. What a shame.

Mrs Ewing: The body is meeting soon.

The Convener: Irene Oldfather suggested that we should also consider transnational Interreg funding, so we will seek information on that. Do members agree that we are formally inviting Dennis Canavan to be our rapporteur?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Is everyone happy? We are doing awfully well.

Pre and Post-council Scrutiny

14:43

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is the one that everybody laughs at—the scrutiny of the Council of the European Union agendas and the reports back.

Mrs Ewing: I am glad that the agriculture and fisheries council has eventually submitted its report. I wanted to raise a point to do with pre-council scrutiny that will probably come up in other documents. I do not know what John Home Robertson's feelings are, but we know that we are coming to the time of year—November and December—when total allowable catches are considered, among other things. The reports that we are hearing are not exactly encouraging for the Scottish fishing industry. Somewhere hidden in among our papers was an indication that there had been a delay in some of the scientific evidence because of a lack of staff. I cannot remember quite how it tied in, but I think that the information was in the sift papers.

The committee should write to the minister responsible for agriculture and fisheries to ask about the baseline on which the Scottish Executive will approach the meeting. I saw a small snippet from Ross Finnie in one of the newspapers—*The Scotsman* perhaps—but the issue has not been given huge coverage because he disagrees with the idea of there being a total ban on cod catches and a 40 per cent reduction in haddock catches. There are arguments about the Shetland box among the papers as well, which will interest Jim Wallace.

The committee should write and ask what the Executive's stance will be in preparation for the council. That is the only thing that we can do.

The Convener: I think that you will have seen the information among the sift papers—information on the Shetland box and the plaice box, if I remember correctly. Is everyone happy with Margaret Ewing's suggestion, although it is slightly out of sync with what is on the agenda?

If there is nothing else on the agendas and reports, are members happy with the recommendations that have been made, which are basically all to thank the Scottish Executive for the information?

Members indicated agreement.

Sift

14:45

The Convener: We move on to the regular sift of European documents and draft legislation. Paper EU/S2/05/15/3 flags up the following items as being especially important to other committees. There is a slight variation in how the papers are now presented that makes it easier to see the items at a glance.

First, there is a series of documents from the Commission that outline a policy framework on a more integrated approach for industrial policy across the EU. That obviously ties in with the Lisbon strategy, so it will be of interest to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

Margaret Ewing has already referred to the paper about certain access restrictions in the common fisheries policy in relation to the Shetland and plaice boxes. Again, that will be of interest to the Environment and Rural Development Committee and we have agreed that a letter will be sent to Ross Finnie.

There is a paper from the Commission that will be of interest to this committee and to the Enterprise and Culture Committee on the appropriateness of establishing Europe-wide rules for a more detailed level in the NUTS classification. That is a very unfortunate acronym. Does anyone remember what it stands for?

Mr Wallace: Nomenclature of statistical territorial units. I only know it because I am reading it.

The Convener: Well done, Mr Wallace. Do members agree with the recommendations that are set out in the sift paper?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Mr Home Robertson: Convener, we always just nod the sift through and I am conscious that quite a lot of work must go into preparing it. It is passed on to the committees but is it on the website for anyone else to see? It is a very useful document that could be helpful to all sorts of people who want to know what is on its way through the European Union. It is worth flagging that up and telling interest groups, businesses and anyone else that this is a very good way of seeing what is in the pipeline.

The Convener: It is a public document.

Mr Home Robertson: So it is not just for us.

The Convener: No. It is on the website for everyone to see.

Nick Hawthorne (Clerk): We could draw attention to it on the web page.

Mr Home Robertson: That might be worth doing because I know that you people do a lot of work to prepare the sift and we just nod it through saying, "Oh yes, that's wonderful," because we have read it, but it is important that other people are aware of it too.

The Convener: Yes. We will do that.

Convener's Report

14:47

The Convener: There are a range of items in the convener's report. The first three concern correspondence that we have sent to the Executive on items from previous meetings.

I wrote to Ross Finnie with the committee's points about his letter of 2 September on the Ferguson Shipbuilders bid for the fisheries protection vessels contract. I am still waiting for a response. Does anyone have any comments on the letter that went out?

Mr Home Robertson: It was an excellent letter.

The Convener: I thought so too.

The second letter arose from a point that Jim Wallace made on the agenda for the transport council meeting on 6 October about public service requirements and the award of public service contracts for passenger transport by rail and road. Jim Wallace pointed out that the agenda did not cover air transport. Tavish Scott has replied and members have a copy of his letter, which mentions an existing regulation that appears to cover air transport. Are members happy to note the information and thank Tavish Scott for his response?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The third item was a request to the Executive for feedback on the better regulation conference that was held in Edinburgh on 22 and 23 September. We are still waiting for a response on that.

The next item is a letter and enclosures from Mr Finnie—we are keeping Mr Finnie very busy—on the transposition of the high-activity sealed sources and orphan sources directive, or HASS directive. The letter that was sent to the Environment and Rural Development Committee says that the intention is to implement the directive by means of UK-wide regulations and, additionally in Scotland, by directions to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Unless members have views, all we have to do is to thank the minister for copying the European and External Relations Committee into the correspondence.

We have received correspondence from my colleague Alyn Smith on the possibility of establishing a European institute of technology in Scotland. Do members have any comments? It is an interesting proposition. I have asked the Executive whether it has discussed it or done anything about it but I have not had anything back yet.

Mrs Ewing: It is a good idea, and I am not saying that in a party-political way. We should

think carefully about the fact that Scotland does not host a major institution of the European Union and should do so because it might enhance the image of Europe.

The Convener: I know that Alyn Smith is very keen that the issue should not be seen as party political and that he has approached people from all political walks of life. There seems to be a general view that it would be a good idea. I am really anxious to hear whether the Executive has considered the possibility, so I will try to chase up the response. I am aware that consultation responses are required by 15 November, which does not leave an awful lot of time. Would it be acceptable if I continue to chase up the issue with the Executive and e-mail members about the responses?

Members indicated agreement.

Mr Home Robertson: It is an exciting idea and it would be a great pity if any one political party tried to take possession of it. I welcome the fact that you and Margaret Ewing have emphasised that point. It might be worth talking to ministers privately about it and seeing what can be done to improve the prospects of getting this institute for Scotland. It would be very valuable and relevant.

The Convener: We can do that.

The next item concerns the agenda for the next meeting of the network of regional parliamentary European committees—NORPEC—which will be held in Magdeburg next week. I will attend the meeting with Dennis Canavan and Derek Brownlee, who will substitute for Phil Gallie. I know that Jim Wallace is unable to attend but I understand that Irene Oldfather will be the Labour party member.

Irene Oldfather: I will certainly try my best to get there next week. I will be in touch with the clerks but I will have to find flights that fit in with the commitments that I already have. That will not be easy but Nick Hawthorne and I are going to look into it.

The Convener: If that cannot be managed would another Labour member be able to attend?

Irene Oldfather: No.

The Convener: That would be a shame. We will try to get that sorted out as soon as possible.

Finally, we have learned that Josep Borrell, the president of the European Parliament, will visit the Scottish Parliament on Thursday 10 November. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is dealing with the visit. I now have some details of how the committee might be involved. There will be a meeting in one of the committee rooms between 1.00 and 1.30 on Thursday 10 November. It will be addressed by Mr Borrell and all MSPs will be

invited. Members should put that in their diaries. The committee room is not confirmed but it should be committee room 2.

I thank members of the public for attending today. The next meeting of the committee will be on 8 November.

14:53

Meeting continued in private until 16:24.

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