

# **EUROPEAN COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 23 June 1999  
*(Morning)*

Meeting 1

£5.00

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## **OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE**

\*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

\*Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
\*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)  
\*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)  
\*Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
\*Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
\*Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
\*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)  
\*Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
\*Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

\*attended

## **COMMITTEE CLERK:**

Stephen Imrie

## **SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK:**

Eugene Windsor

## **ASSISTANT CLERK:**

David Simpson



# Scottish Parliament

## European Committee

Wednesday 23 June 1999

(Morning)

[THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE *opened the meeting at 09:32*]

**Maureen Macmillan (Oldest Member of the Committee):** Good morning everybody. I start by notifying members that, in the event of fire, the clerking team will ensure that they are shown safely out of the room.

I welcome members to the first meeting of the European Committee. Does everybody have today's agenda?

**Members:** Yes.

### Interests

**Maureen Macmillan:** I am the oldest member of this committee—looking around the room, I find that hard to believe—and so have been given my moment of glory. I am charged with presiding over the first two items of business: the declaration of members' interests and the election of a convener. Once a convener has been elected, I will hand over to that person. Dr Ewing and Ben Wallace send their apologies.

I must ask members whether they have any interests to declare. Members will recall that, under the Scotland Act 1998 (Transitory and Transitional Provisions) (Members' Interests) Order 1999,

"Where a member has a registrable interest in respect of which he has lodged a statement under article 4(2)(a) which would prejudice or give the appearance of prejudicing his ability to participate in a disinterested manner in proceedings of the Parliament relating to any particular matter, he shall, before otherwise participating in those proceedings, make an oral statement in those proceedings declaring the nature of that registrable interest."

If members have anything that they want to mention, they should not hold back, even if it does not seem important.

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** I have not registered this interest, as it is not required to be registered, but for the purposes of this committee it should be noted that I am a member of the Committee of the Regions.

**Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** I am in the same position. In my declaration of interests I registered my membership of the Committee of the Regions, but I want to bring it to

the attention of this committee—although, as Mr Henry says, that is not absolutely required.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I am not sure whether this is of interest—I merely take the precaution of mentioning it at this stage—but I am still a member of Perth and Kinross Council. Issues relating to councils and structural funding may be considered to be of interest to me.

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** I, too, may have an interest. As a journalist, I hope that in future I will be paid to write articles about Europe. I have been doing that for years, so not much will have changed.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** As a farmer, I should declare a pecuniary interest, because my business is in receipt of European funding.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I am an employee of British Telecommunications Scotland, which has extensive European interests.

### Convener

**Maureen Macmillan:** We move on to the second item. On a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau, Parliament has decided that the party whose members are eligible to convene this committee is the Labour party. I invite the person whom the Labour party has nominated as convener to identify himself or herself.

**Hugh Henry:** I have been nominated by the Labour party to put myself forward for the position of convener.

**Maureen Macmillan:** Is the committee content for Mr Henry to be elected as convener?

*Hugh Henry was elected convener by acclamation.*

**The Convener (Hugh Henry):** Thank you. I hope that this committee will be hard-working and of interest not only to its members, but to Parliament and to wider Scottish society. The European agenda is facing difficulties at the moment; the recent European election had the worst turnout on record. We need to address the gap between the voting record in Scotland—and, indeed, in the United Kingdom as a whole—and that in other parts of Europe.

It would be wrong to underestimate the increasing influence that Europe has on our lives. It impinges on everything that we do. That was evident even from members' declarations of interests. Among us are journalists, who write about Europe frequently; members of local authorities, which are affected by Europe financially and by European legislation; and representatives of private companies, which seek to enter the European market and bid for

European contracts. Various sections of our community, including the farming community, are recipients of European funding. Europe is increasingly important, and I hope that this committee will reflect that in its work.

This committee is intended to be non-partisan in its operation. I hope that we can work together on issues that affect the Parliament and Scotland, addressing matters that we regard as significant. I hope that our work will have an effect. This committee should not become bogged down in the details of obscure European legislation. It should reflect European policy and seek to influence it, both directly and through the United Kingdom channels in which we operate. We have a big agenda that we should not underestimate. How we operate as a committee will be determined largely by the collective efforts of members. If we choose to concentrate on the minutiae, I fear that we will achieve little. If we are prepared to set our sights on the bigger picture and to seek to influence debate, there is much that we can achieve. I am delighted to have been chosen by the committee as convener.

In a moment I will open up the debate on our remit and topics for further briefing. Before I do so, I want to repeat that we have a unique opportunity to be a voice for Scotland in Europe. In the rest of Europe there is genuine interest in what we are doing. As I indicated earlier, I am a member of the Committee of the Regions, and there is genuine excitement among representatives of all European countries about the creation of this Scottish Parliament; I know that members of other European institutions will say the same.

Representatives from Scotland are warmly welcomed in the corridors of power in Europe. That will reflect on us and we will be considered and listened to with interest by other European bodies and by those elected to the various European institutions. A lot is expected of us, but there is also a warmth and a willingness to listen to us. I throw it open to the committee now to discuss the committee's remit, taking into account some of the comments that I have made.

## Remit

**Tavish Scott:** Mr Convener—I am not sure which title you intend to take, so I will call you Mr Convener for now—I concur with your opening remarks, apart from one point: the minutiae of legislation. In many areas, the details are extremely important. I can think of some matters that affect my constituency in Shetland about which there is real concern and debate on the need to scrutinise European legislation and proposals adequately. We need to balance the way in which the committee works to ensure that we concentrate not only on the wider picture,

which it is right to do, but on the smaller points and issues, which are important in other ways—for the salmon industry in Shetland or for fish-processing businesses throughout the north-east of Scotland, for example.

It is also important to concentrate on how we can maximise European Union funding for Scotland. As Maureen will know, there has been debate this morning about objective 1 funding for the Highlands and Islands. In my part of the world, that is an extremely important matter and we should pay particular attention to it.

In setting out the way in which we conduct ourselves and receive briefings, it would also be useful to arrange regular, though informal, discussions with members of the European Parliament and with other opinion formers, decision makers and people interested in the wider European debate. I see that, importantly, there are representatives from the Scottish representative office here today. I encourage the convener regularly to arrange informal meetings with them so that we can keep ourselves as informed as possible.

**The Convener:** I accept that there will be times when we need to look at things in detail, but the issue that I raised is relevant. We should not underestimate how bogged down we could get in totally irrelevant European detail. For example, the documents that have arrived that, technically, we must examine include the agreement between the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation on the carriage of goods by road and rail and a council decision on the extension of the Common Position 96/635/CFSP on Burma/Myanmar. Those things are clearly of no specific interest to us. However, you are right that, to ensure that we are truly reflecting the needs of the people who elected us, we will have to examine the issues that affect Scotland.

**Bruce Crawford:** I am not sure whether the questions that I have in mind relate to the remit or to the role of the committee, but they are milestones for the future and we need to consider them.

Like Tavish, I believe that we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of which details are important. I am not sure what the process for that should be, but we need to identify them. We also need to agree how we are going to liaise with MEPs to put forward Scotland's cause. I listened with interest yesterday to Rory Watson talking about the briefings that MEPs receive. Whatever the information is, I would like to get my hands on it so that I can understand more about the issues. The briefing may be the explanatory memoranda prepared by relevant Whitehall departments, about which the clerks have told us; if so, that is all well and good. However, I would like to know whether

there is a difference and how soon we will be able to get our hands on that sort of material.

I was also interested to read in the briefing material about the agreement that is being considered between the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. We need some sort of concordat that will determine the relationship between us and Westminster and how we deal with specific pieces of legislation that affect the United Kingdom and Scotland in particular. What work has been done on that draft concordat and when will we see it?

I am also concerned about early-warning systems. Margo has a particular interest in those so I will leave her to deal with them. There are on-going issues regarding the reform of EU structural funds. We are expecting the results of that process in mid-June, which is not far away. An early briefing to the committee on the implications of the changes would be useful.

More important, for the longer term, we need to address the institutional challenges and questions that face the EU. In particular, what institutions will be required for the enlargement of the EU following the Treaty of Amsterdam? How will decisions be made and who will make them? What will the role of the European Commission be after enlargement? What developments can we expect in relation to a European army, a European police force, immigration policy and the impact of the Kosovo crisis, for example? All of those issues will impact on where Europe goes.

Another key question raised by the Treaty of Amsterdam is how we can get closer to our citizens. Fundamentally, how are we going to get involved in the debate on how the EU is funded? All of those questions are zooming around in my mind. I do not have an answer to any of them, but I need to talk about them with my colleagues here and begin to get an understanding of them.

09:45

**The Convener:** Those are all legitimate points. I was going to come on to topics for further briefings as the second part of this item, but a number of matters have been raised that we will have to consider; I am sure that others will be added to the list. At the moment, however, I want to look at our broader remit.

**Ms Oldfather:** There is a wealth of experience on this committee, which I hope we can use to deal with issues as positively and constructively as they are—in my experience—in Europe.

The convener mentioned the low turnout at the European elections and the fact that the Scottish people are a little disillusioned about Europe and switched off by it. We have a unique opportunity to

turn that around. We have the opportunity to reflect Scottish views in Europe, but also to reflect European views in Scotland. I hope that we use those opportunities.

I am pleased that two areas in particular have been included in the remit of the committee. Point 4 of the briefing sets out the committee's duty

"To undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of proposed legislation referred to it by the Parliamentary Bureau."

That gives us an important opportunity to influence things before they are set in stone. I am also pleased that, as point 10 of the briefing states, we have the opportunity to consider petitions referred to us by the Public Petitions Committee. That, again, gives us an opportunity to liaise and work with the Scottish people and to reflect their interests. I am excited by the committee's remit and I look forward to the work that we can do for Scotland.

**The Convener:** The point about legislative scrutiny is essential. We need to get Scotland's voice heard before Westminster and Whitehall form opinions. The timing is critical. We must also hold the Scottish Executive to account. That role should not be underestimated, especially in relation to some of the matters that Bruce mentioned.

**Ms MacDonald:** Can we make a decision—should we call you convener or chair?

**The Convener:** Convener.

**Ms MacDonald:** Mr Convener, like Irene, I am interested by point 4 of our remit. If we believe that it is part of our remit and duty to ensure that people get to love Europe or at least have a more realistic understanding of Europe, we must concern ourselves with—if you like—the pre-emptive strikes. We need to get involved as soon as the European Commission proposes legislation. There is quite a time lag before the legislation becomes real, and it is during that time that we get newspaper stories about bendy bananas and terrible straight Euro-bananas, with pictures to cut out and compare.

I am being jocular, but it is a serious point. In Scotland, there has been no concerted effort to counter the terribly negative spin that is sometimes put on the European Commission's more imaginative proposals that have never come to legislative fruition. That is something that we could productively do; we are not going to disagree about that.

As well as the other things that this committee will require to do, I am concerned about our relations with other committees in the Parliament, which may think that we are shuffling off our work load on to them. However, if we are to have any sort of joined-up politics—please excuse the

phrase—we will have to work closely with, for example, the transport committee and with any committee that is considering energy. I hope that we will call on some of the expertise in the Parliament—for example, that of Robin Harper. He is not on this committee, but a great deal of what he might have to add to the Parliament's work would also add to our understanding of many of the big challenges that are facing Europe. I am not making a plea, but I know that we have an arrangement whereby we can co-opt people or ask them to come along especially.

**The Convener:** All MSPs have the right to attend the committee. Mr Harper has the right to attend and speak if he so wishes, but he does not have the right to vote.

**Ms MacDonald:** No, but debates in this committee would not be toe-to-toe stuff.

**The Convener:** MSPs have the right to come to this committee, and I hope that some will take the opportunity.

**Ms MacDonald:** Finally and briefly, although we have a huge work load, and although it will take us a fair amount of time to work out how to select and compartmentalise what we are going to do and how we are going to do it, we must not lose sight of the fact that Europe is a dynamic confederation of peoples. If we, as Scotland, claim the right to be able to add something to Europe, we must consider the big picture. We have a huge work load and there will be terrible pressure on us—especially as this is the first Scottish Parliament—to do our very best and to do it earnestly. However, we lose sight of the big picture at our peril—Europe will come to mean absolutely nothing to the people who live in it and who turned their back on it at the elections. We cannot ignore the big picture.

**The Convener:** Do we all agree that we want this committee to be a powerful voice for Scotland in Europe, reflecting the work of the Scottish Parliament? Do we also agree that we have a special role in scrutinising in detail relevant European legislation, especially before Westminster confirms any particular views? As Margo says, we need to promote the European agenda positively so that people understand some of the benefits of engagement with Europe and are not negative about Europe. Do we agree that we have a role in scrutinising and in holding to account the Scottish Executive, which we will do on behalf of Parliament, and that we need to forge links in the European Union with relevant bodies such as the European Parliament and Commission, and with other representative bodies? We will also consider the links that Tavish mentioned. Do we all generally agree?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** I would like to build on what Margo said about making people in Scotland much more aware of Europe.

**Ms MacDonald:** People must have a realistic idea about Europe. We all love to be good Europeans but we do not have a clue what that means.

**Dr Jackson:** Exactly. That has a lot to do with, for example, education for citizenship. I assume that this point would come under point 13 of our remit about liaising with the wider European constituency in Scotland. Can the points in our remit be altered? I do not think that point 13 says enough about the aspect that Margo mentioned and with which we all agree. Perhaps the remit should be slightly altered to mention promoting—although I do not know whether that is the right word—Europe in Scotland.

**Ms MacDonald:** We get very po-faced when we talk about “deepening appreciation” and so on.

**Dr Jackson:** Yes, but it is that aspect that I do not think is quite included in point 13.

**The Convener:** The standing orders detail the remit, but we have flexibility in our interpretation of it. As long as we are agreed on the direction that we want to take, we can move things forward.

**Bruce Crawford:** I want to raise a similar point to the one that Sylvia made. The standing orders may be set in stone and unalterable but, following on from what the convener has said, I am quite happy provided that we can interpret the standing orders widely. The remit does not give us the latitude, within the European framework, to have influence and to lobby on behalf of Scotland and there is nothing about how we will liaise with MEPs and discuss issues with them. The remit talks about the

“wider European constituency in Scotland”,

but that may or may not include MEPs.

**The Convener:** I will talk about MEPs separately in a minute. If we feel that our ability to promote Europe and to influence debate is being impeded, we can look again at the remit. However, that would need to be done through the Parliamentary Bureau; we cannot change the remit unilaterally.

It is early days yet, and there is an aspiration to do the things that committee members have mentioned. Let us see whether we can do those things adequately and properly within the terms that have been laid down. If we find that difficult, or if we are failing, we can, by all means, make proposals to change the remit.

I would like to move on to discuss some of the detail of how we will carry out our remit. Bruce has mentioned a range of important topics for further



briefing. I think that it will be necessary for the committee to meet during the recess. We will have to consider a number of issues, not least structural funds. Having looked at the officials' holiday patterns, I suggest that we should try to meet again some time in August and that I should arrange an agenda with the clerks, bearing in mind some of the suggestions that have been made this morning. Are we agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I will also ask the clerks to come back with some suggestions on scrutiny and how we can set priorities. There are things that we will need to scrutinise, things that other committees will need to scrutinise, things that the Parliament will need to scrutinise and things that may not need to be scrutinised at all. For future reference, it would be helpful if we set things out in tables; if we want to alter the clerks' recommendations, we can do so. We should do that at an early date, and we will have some suggestions ready for the meeting in August. In August, we will also have to examine the issue of structural funds.

I hope that there will be regular contact with MEPs. I am anxious to set up a liaison process for this committee not just with MEPs but with some of the wider representative organisations in Scotland. For example, Scotland Europa reflects the interests of a wide range of Scottish society—trade unions, the voluntary sector, the private sector, the academic institutions and so on—and I hope that we can engage with it. I would like us also to engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which not only has a significant interest in Scottish society, but has carried out a lot of first-class work with which the Scottish Office and other bodies have been closely involved. Either at our next meeting or at the one after it, we need to discuss how we liaise with other bodies.

In the autumn, I would like us to convene some sort of Scotland in Europe seminar to discuss how we can take the lead in allowing those other bodies to play a full part. We do not want to replace the work that those bodies do; we want to give them, where relevant, a proper voice. I would like to invite interested parties and representative bodies to meet us to discuss with an open mind how we can start to develop our agenda over the next few years.

10:00

**Ms Oldfather:** It might be helpful for committee members to understand the key current priorities in Europe. The European Commission produces an annual legislative programme; there is one in place for 1999 and the 2000 programme is under discussion. If the programme could be brought to the next meeting, members could be informed and

advised about the current debate in Europe. That would give us a useful opportunity to think ahead about how we want to influence the debate next year.

**The Convener** *indicated agreement.*

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** We should consider moving the committee around the country to a certain extent, rather than always meeting in Edinburgh. I realise that there would be cost implications, but it would be helpful if we had a meeting in the Highlands, for example. If we want to promote Europe in Scotland, we must take the committee to different parts of the country.

**The Convener:** I am more than happy to discuss alternative locations for meetings. From my previous work with COSLA, I know that we will need to address specific issues in the Highlands and Islands. While we could accommodate the suggestion of alternative locations, I do not want the committee to become a travelling circus, with every second meeting in a different location. If an alternative location aids the committee's work and helps the wider body in Scotland to appreciate that work, by all means we should consider it.

**Ms MacDonald:** If the proposed meeting was at a relevant time for the area concerned?

**The Convener:** Yes.

Ben Wallace has now arrived. We had the opportunity earlier to declare any interests. Does he have anything to declare?

**Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):** No, I am afraid not.

**The Convener:** Any formal meetings of the committee have to be agreed in advance by the Parliamentary Bureau, but we will deal sensitively with the location of meetings.

Allan wishes to speak now, then David.

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** Thank you, convener. I almost called you Hugh—I presume that we can all drop the formal approach and call each other by our first names.

I was a bit worried when Maureen spoke because I thought that she was talking about moving the committee around Europe, so I am pleased to find that we are confining our activities to Scotland. I support the concept that we should be accessible to people in other parts of the country. Given the current division of objective 1 funding, the two island communities in my constituency would be interested in our deliberations.

I was concerned about a question that arose from what Irene said. I read the briefing paper assiduously last night—I hope that I will be able to

do the same with all future briefs—and it struck me that the main issue for the committee will be selectivity. The convener, and Irene, mentioned that we must prioritise our work. Does the convener have any guidance for us on his role—and the role of the committee in general—in that process? I know that safeguards are built in and I am impressed by the prospect of a European database that could be accessed by all MSPs and by the Executive. However, if we are to fulfil our function and prioritise our work for maximum impact, the process by which we will achieve that is important. A scatter-gun approach will not work in Europe or in Westminster.

**The Convener:** In terms of both European legislation and Scottish legislation that has a European dimension, I hinted earlier that I would like the clerks to produce recommendations about the categories into which legislation might fall. It would then be for us to accept or reject those recommendations. We need assistance with setting the legislation into some kind of order.

As far as the main issues are concerned, priorities are a matter for this committee and I hope that we will start the process of setting priorities as early as the next meeting. As Irene indicated, we can consider what the big issues will be over the next year and spend some time examining them.

We can draw upon other models. For example, the House of Commons works in a different way to the House of Lords, which goes into much more detail and examines some of the broader issues. I have presented evidence to both Houses and the differences are interesting.

Priorities will be a matter for this committee and we will have to participate in determining them.

**David Mundell:** I very much welcome the proposal for a seminar to broaden the discussion so that we can get a better idea of who, in Scotland, is interested in Europe. The body of interest is broader than we often think and, in my experience of Europe, I have come across groups that have small offices, or small representations, or that fall under larger umbrella groups. Part of the seminar exercise would be for us all to understand who in the Scottish community is already directly interested in Europe and what they are doing. We would also discover what they, and others, identify as their current issues with Europe.

Some of that relates to the work of other committees and, as Tavish mentioned earlier, there are already a lot of issues in farming and rural activities. It would be helpful to know what the main European issues are for business and civic Scotland and what we can do on those issues.

**The Convener:** We have the opportunity to

invite a range of people to address the committee and I hope that we will consider doing that. We also have the opportunity to bring in advisers or specialists to assist the committee's work and, at the next meeting, we might start to consider how to do that.

In terms of networking, we also want to engage with the Executive, possibly informally at this stage until we have a clear view of how the committee will work. While we are considering the European agenda, we need to have discussions with the Executive to ensure that it is working in the same way.

**Bruce Crawford:** Does the range of people that we can invite to discussions or to give evidence include UK ministers, officials from UK departments, MEPs—who may be in the European Executive—and members of the European Commission?

**The Convener:** We can certainly invite a broad range of people, but whether they can attend is another matter, as many such individuals have a heavy agenda. At times, we may want to invite some of the people that Bruce Crawford identified, but, as with other issues, selectivity will be the key point.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** The briefing paper gives us a focus to remind us that our priorities ought to be the issues that are particularly important to Scotland and that have a greater relative significance to Scotland than to the rest of the UK. That is helpful, and if we do not bear it in mind, we could disappear under a mountain of paperwork and the electronic mail that we will receive once the database—which I welcome—has been set up.

It is also important to support the idea of a sifting process. The briefing paper suggests that the convener and deputy convener would be involved in that process and that would be quite useful, but we should bear in mind that we can also use the committee members' expertise.

I want to mention the structure and functioning of the committee. While I support the idea of taking the committees out and about, I am a wee bit anxious about that notion and I want to avoid the situation in which we are all arguing to take the committee to our areas. I admit that I am interested in taking the committee to Ayrshire. We are right to talk about moving the committee when relevant, rather than merely for the sake of moving it.

I am also anxious about the amount of time that we will spend in committee. I would like some indication of how often the committee will be scheduled to meet. Will there be additional sub-committees over and above that? How will we

physically manage that? We should also consider the links between this and other committees. For example, I am on the Transport and the Environment Committee. There are clearly important links with that committee that could be quite useful. We will all have a huge work load and we need some indication of how often we might be required to meet.

**The Convener:** We have already addressed the issue of location. I wondered whether Allan was making a bid for Millport as the standing home of the committee.

This will be one of the busier committees and it could well be that we will have to meet weekly. We must wait and see. We have agreed to meet sometime in August. I do not propose that we meet for the sake of meeting, but given the volume of work that is before us, and that there are tentacles into other committees, we will probably have to meet more frequently than most. I do not think that we should decide now, but we can assume that the committee will meet very frequently.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** That links to networking and possibly to a briefing paper. I was trying to think of an action point for the next committee meeting. Would it be possible to get a paper examining the links with Europe? That was suggested as the starting point in the briefing paper we have here.

We should think about the organisations in Scotland that have direct European links. I think another committee member has mentioned that, and you mentioned Scotland Europa, convener. There are the other interests, including business interests, which obviously have a direct link with Europe. Cathy's point was that we ensure that we always emphasise the Scottish element. It might be a good starting point for the next meeting if we could have lists from these three areas: organisations with direct links in Europe; Scottish agencies that link with Europe; and those businesses, and so on, that have less direct but substantial links with Europe.

**The Convener:** Some of what you are suggesting could usefully be dealt with in the seminar that was mentioned earlier. A range of bodies would be invited to that and we could talk about how the links have developed and who does what.

**Dr Jackson:** The committee could link in with that.

**The Convener:** Yes. We could look at the possibility of an outline paper that would help us to work towards that process. I do not want that to replace hearing about the other bodies and what they do. The other thing that we will need to look at—whether through a briefing paper or a

discussion—is the role of EU institutions and how they work. As a committee we need an understanding of the labyrinthic way that some of the institutions operate. That could be added to the programme.

We have already mentioned networking and we have talked about members of the European Parliament and of other representative bodies. We can examine that. Allan made a point about how we decide priorities and we can also start deciding whom we want to invite to the committee. Is there a time when we will want to bring in someone from the UK Parliament, the European Commission or other bodies?

10:15

We will also need to examine the role of Scotland House in Brussels fairly soon. We need an early briefing on who will have access to it and how it will operate. We need to know what it will do, how it will liaise with this committee, when it will be open and what its various functions will be. Maybe Stephen Imrie could look into that for the next meeting.

I take Allan's point and the points of others. I do not want this to become a travelling circus, but given the nature of the work, there will be a time when we will need to meet with representatives of some European bodies. We must arrange it so that time is usefully spent by getting as many people together in one place as possible, or by meeting them over as short a space of time as possible. We must look at establishing those links on behalf of the Parliament.

**Ms MacDonald:** May I call you Hugh, Mr Convener?

**The Convener:** Aye. I have been called worse.

**Ms MacDonald:** Me too. I am thinking about what Sylvia said. Would it be possible to have a list of the organisations—which we trust the clerks to identify—that receive European funding of some sort? It may be invidious to mention them by name, but I can think of a couple of outfits that receive some European funding and that would be quite pleased to link in some way to the functions of decision making and scrutiny. That relates to what Cathy asked about how we get help in deciding what goes to the top of the pile. Some of those organisations may be able to help in that respect because they already get specialised or special interest briefings, or they have links established that we might duplicate.

**The Convener:** There are bodies who have, as you indicated, some expertise in European matters. Some of them are involved with wider representative bodies. I would hesitate to say at the moment that we should do as you suggest

because there is a huge number of bodies in receipt of European funding, all of which have different expertise. We really do not have the time to invite every body in Scotland that receives European funding. It would frighten people to realise how significant European funding has become. If there is a way that we can tap into the expertise that, for example, the voluntary sector has accumulated, and that of the housing sector and the private sector, we would want to avail ourselves of that.

**Ms Oldfather:** Most European funding tends to be distributed through partnerships, even in the private sector. The way to access the expertise in which Margo is interested would, perhaps, be through Strathclyde European Partnership and East of Scotland European Consortium.

**Allan Wilson:** I want to go back to Cathy's point about linking with other committees and with our colleagues in other parts of the Parliament. I noticed that there was a suggestion in the briefing paper—and whoever wrote it has produced a very good paper—that we appoint reporters, or rapporteurs as I suppose we should call them in the European Committee. They would liaise between this and the other committees and could be drawn from those of us who sit on other committees. I, for example, sit on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and Cathy has an interest in transport. I do not know what committees other members of this committee sit on. Would it be possible to have some ideas put together about how that might work, if at all, in practice?

**The Convener:** That is something that we will need to look at. It has been mentioned in the documentation and it is a system that works well in Europe and to which there will be some advantage. As with everything else, we must proceed cautiously and find out what our agenda and work load will be like. We must examine the areas of expertise and find out what experts and advisers we can bring in so that we can evolve towards that. It will have a place in our deliberations.

**Bruce Crawford:** I am quite happy with the short-term programme you have outlined. We have a good starting process.

I would like to come back to some of what I said earlier about the longer-term issues. I know that we cannot deal with that in August or, perhaps, even in the autumn, but it is something that the officials need to start thinking about in terms of information being provided for us. The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in 1997 and was ratified only a few months ago. It dealt with enlargement and with bringing the EU closer to its citizens.

Huge issues are involved: how the institutions

will work; how enlargement will affect Scotland; how decisions will be made; the role of the European Commission; how the institutions will be brought closer to citizens; and funding. At some point, we will have to tackle those subjects in a deep and meaningful way and try to understand their implications.

**The Convener:** We will need specific briefings on some of those matters from people whom we bring in to do that.

**Maureen Macmillan:** I wondered about bringing in young people through links to the education committees. If we are to promote Europe, we should use the willingness of young people to be involved with Europe. There have been good educational schemes that made links with Europe but a lot of them seem to have died off. Have we a role in promoting that sort of thing, or is our role more to examine legislation?

**The Convener:** Our work is not just about examining legislation and considering how European policy will affect us. As Margo said earlier, it is also about having a wider influence. We have to set a positive agenda and encourage people to form bonds and relationships across Europe. Much of what is happening in Europe can improve the quality of life in Scotland, but it is a two-way process and the reverse can happen. Sometimes, Scotland is a bit slow to proclaim what it does well. There should be an exchange of views.

We should encourage other committees to do what you are suggesting, Maureen. We might want the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to examine the role that young people could play. There have been many excellent and imaginative schemes throughout the country—I know of some in my area and in the west of Scotland. Such schemes are the way forward because, with all due respect, it is not the people on this committee who will make Europe work, but the young people in the communities that we represent. They have a great role to play in the Europe of the future.

**Ms Oldfather:** I endorse what you say, convener. Since reorganisation, many unitary authorities, such as North Ayrshire in my area, have developed excellent links with schools in Europe. Educational exchanges have been a positive development of the past three or four years. In my constituency, a school that could be considered to be in a deprived area is linking up with a college in Pisa in Italy to do art project exchanges. There are further excellent examples of such initiatives throughout Scotland. We should promote that sort of exchange and make information available to authorities that do not know how to take up such opportunities.

**The Convener:** Is there any other business?

**David Mundell:** I would appreciate it if we could arrange an informal meeting—not a formal joint meeting—with the Scottish MEPs. I met the ones that the Conservative party now has but I have not met the others.

**The Convener:** We have already said that we want to establish links with the MEPs and we will come back with proposals in August about how to do that. During the next month or so, very little will happen.

If there is no other business, I would like the committee to endorse a press release that has been prepared. I will circulate it now. It says that we have met and that I have been elected as the convener and it sets out some of the work that we will do.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** The press release says that the committee has 13 members. Are there not 12 members?

**The Convener:** There are 12 members on the committee but 13 places.

**Bruce Crawford:** A process is under way to resolve that situation by the end of the week.

**The Convener:** Does the committee endorse the press release? [MEMBERS: "Yes."] I thank members for their attendance and look forward to seeing them at the next meeting.

*Meeting closed at 10:25.*



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