

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 November 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

8th Meeting

CONVENER

*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)
*Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
*Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)
*Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
*Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)
*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
*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

WITNESSES:

Councillor Christine May (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
Adrian Colwell (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
Jon Jordan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Stephen Imrie

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK:

Eugene Windsor

ASSISTANT CLERK:

David Simpson

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 23 November 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:04*]

The Convener (Hugh Henry): I convene the meeting now that Margo MacDonald has arrived. We were waiting for you, Margo.

I have apologies from Ben Wallace. David Mundell and Tavish Scott will be slightly late.

Priorities

The Convener: The first item on the agenda is a presentation from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Councillor Christine May, who is the COSLA spokesperson on European issues, is here with Adrian Colwell and Jon Jordan. We invited COSLA to give the committee its thoughts on the development of the Scottish Parliament's European agenda and, possibly, to indicate how it would like the future relationship between Scottish local government and the Scottish Parliament to develop.

From my previous activity—I am perhaps slightly biased—I think COSLA is probably at the leading edge of European work, at both political and officer levels. It has helped to shape much of the European dimension in Scotland. Many of us are appreciative of the work that COSLA has done and will, doubtless, continue to do. Without further ado, I hand over to Councillor May.

Councillor Christine May (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): At the outset, I wish to thank you, convener, for inviting me to make this presentation to the European Committee. My firm belief, which is based on 11 years' experience of dealing with European issues in local government, is that a successful relationship in European terms is firmly based on a successful partnership with all those involved. That includes all politicians, individual members of the community, the business community and the academic community, and is the basis of my approach to working on European issues.

I will outline the growing partnership that Scottish local government has with the institutions of the European Union. Members will be aware that COSLA has produced a paper on its relations with the European Union, the structure of which largely follows the framework proposed in the questionnaire circulated by the committee to

partner organisations.

It must be emphasised that the European Union has a great influence on the Scottish domestic policy agenda and a major effect on the policy competences where responsibilities lie with the Scottish Parliament and local government. Most local government services have a European dimension and each treaty seems to include more competences at a European level in which Scottish local government has an interest. For example, the Amsterdam treaty was ratified earlier this year and included new competences in employment creation and social inclusion. It also extended competences in the area of equal opportunities.

There is a proud record of innovation in Scotland in these policy areas, which are important for local government. As I have said before, there is a growing recognition that complex policy problems need action from all spheres of Government. Problems such as the fight against unemployment and against drugs and the need for greater social inclusion are in that category, and all spheres of Government must work closely to produce effective solutions.

Scottish local government's involvement with the European Community goes back to the early 1980s, when local government began to use the structural fund programmes to fund capital projects aimed at economic development and training projects. By the time that local government reorganisation was proposed, most of the regional councils and the larger district councils had teams of European officers. The Single European Act 1986 and the Maastricht treaty extended European competences so that many new competences were shared with local government. The Single European Act 1986 produced the single European market 1992 campaign, and over half the 200 measures proposed had an effect on Scottish local government. The importance of local and regional government was recognised in the Maastricht treaty, through the creation of the Committee of the Regions. I have the great pleasure of serving on that committee with the convener, Hugh Henry, and Irene Oldfather.

The Committee of the Regions is an advisory body with 222 members drawn from the 15 member states. It must be consulted on a wide range of issues, including regional development, education, training, transport, public health and social policy. Not only has it been successful in outlining the role of local and regional government in the European Union, it has served as a valuable forum to exchange views with local and regional government politicians from the 15 member states.

I turn to the four distinct areas of European interest for Scottish local government. They are co-funding of projects with the European Union;

the implementation of European legislation; the influence of the European Union on local communities and the business community; and the exchange of experience and best practice between European, local and regional government. I will discuss each of those areas briefly.

Since the European Committee began its work in July, it has spent a significant amount of time considering the future of the structural funds. That has also been an important issue for COSLA and for Scottish local government. We have played a strong role in the partnerships that were created after the 1988 reforms and we are major users of the funds to help to deliver our economic development strategies. In many respects, the structural fund partnerships have been extremely effective in Scotland and have promoted partnership working across many other areas of the public sector. They are important in terms of local government and the Scottish public sector generally. They greatly assisted the diversification of the economy and are helping to create a modern economy.

While the mainstream funds are important, there are grants for European projects in a wide range of policy areas; for example, the community initiatives project, which provides for jobs in spatial planning, training, equal opportunities and urban projects. There is also co-financing of local authority projects available in education, culture, youth work and environmental projects. Those projects are transnational in nature and thus promote greater co-operation between communities across the European Union.

The second area of interest is the implementation of legislation. Scottish local government is the enforcing agency for environmental legislation, particularly environmental health, and consumer protection and trading standards. It is also bound by directives such as the landfill directive and other waste disposal and environmental regulation.

Collectively, Scottish local government is the largest employer in Scotland and therefore an enormous amount of health and safety, employment and equal opportunities legislation affects the way in which member authorities operate. Recent examples are the working time directive and the parental leave directive, which comes into effect, I think, on 15 December. COSLA currently holds the presidency of the employers platform of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which was formed to represent local government as employers and which has developed an effective dialogue with the Commission and with the European Public Services Union.

The third area of interest is the way in which the

European Union affects local communities and local businesses. That became most noticeable under the Single European Act 1986 and the 1992 single market campaign, which stressed the freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital. That has a major impact on many areas of council work: as education providers, where we must provide our children with skills so that they can work and live in Europe; and in terms of business support, where we advise businesses of the greater trade opportunities associated with our membership of the European Union.

The exchange of experience and best practice is an important aspect of our relationship with our European counterparts in local and regional government. Diversification in rural areas, for example, is a problem shared with other rural areas of the European Union. The restructuring of traditional industrial areas is equally shared with our partner states. We must work closely with colleagues throughout Europe to devise new solutions and exchange best practice. The European Union makes money available for transnational projects to stimulate the exchange of experience.

As well as taking part in and leading transnational projects, Scottish local government has taken a leading role in European organisations such as the Assembly of European Regions and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe. My own council is an active member of the Assembly of European Regions and of the European Regions of Industrial Technology. We are closely involved with the North Sea Commission, which, as I am sure many committee members will be aware, was largely responsible for getting the INTERREG IIC programme up and running. That has brought benefits to maritime and northern dimension areas.

At your previous meeting, politicians from Saxony-Anhalt spoke to the committee on the 10th anniversary of the removal of the Berlin wall. The former Strathclyde Regional Council devised and operated one of the first major exchange of experience programmes to central and eastern Europe, through the ECOS-Ouverture programme.

14:15

You can see from what I have said that Scottish local government has a successful record of partnership with European institutions and of co-operation with local and regional government across the European Union and into the wider Europe—as we must not forget the applicant states, which are important. That partnership and co-operation has helped to develop best practice and strengthens the local government voice. That helps when local government across Europe

agrees a common position, which it does frequently through the Committee of the Regions.

Through COSLA, we have had an effective dialogue with the European Community for many years. In the 1980s, COSLA helped to establish the Local Government International Bureau with colleagues from English local authority associations and joined with other associations across Europe to promote and share the common interests of local government. COSLA's activity in structural funds began in 1989, when it established a structure to administer the local authority European social fund programmes.

In 1993, COSLA established an office in Brussels, which was located in the Scotland Europa centre. It worked with business to help to promote Scotland. COSLA feels that membership of Scotland Europa has been successful and that Scotland Europa has provided a strong focus for Scottish activities in Brussels. COSLA has worked closely with partner organisations in Scotland Europa to ensure that there is one voice speaking for Scotland. We look forward to the new opportunities to do that, together with the Parliament, in Scotland House.

There are five officers working on European policy in COSLA's Edinburgh and Brussels offices. COSLA consults with member councils on forthcoming proposals from Brussels, influences European institutions through its advocacy strategies and informs member councils of European funding programmes and legislation. We have a European members network, which meets quarterly and each council nominates a member, who, I am pleased to say, is usually the leader or a senior member of the administration.

COSLA provides the secretariat for the four Scottish members of the Committee of the Regions and, with the Local Government International Bureau, it provides the secretariat to the UK delegation, so we speak with a common voice for the UK when that is agreed. COSLA and LGIB also provide the secretariat to the United Kingdom local authority delegation to the Council of Europe. That is another partnership link which is important for getting a coherent strategy for Scotland in Europe.

The Brussels office has been important in providing information and intelligence in both directions. It promotes greater contact between the European institutions and Scottish local government and allows us to work more closely with other associations. It plays a key role in our relationship with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and with the European local authority network.

I will now discuss the relationship between local government and the Scottish Parliament and its

importance for producing a Scottish strategy. We must be aware of the challenges that Europe faces. Enlargement to the east is essential to preserve peace and prosperity but will change the nature of the Union. We must have a debate in Scotland to discuss enlargement and the opportunities that it will bring. With the discussions about the intergovernmental conference beginning next year, it is important that there is a Scottish view on enlargement. The Committee of the Regions last week adopted a resolution on enlargement following a successful conference. That demonstrates a good way of discussing an issue, then taking a position.

Another area where the public and democratic sector of Scotland needs to work closely together will be economic and monetary union. Whether we go into the single currency or not, it will have an impact on business, particularly on Scottish companies that export or supply to multinationals. We must work closely together to ensure that Scottish companies are ready for this challenge. This has begun through the Scottish Euro Forum; the public sector, together, now needs to build on the work of that forum.

The EU is trying to promote the information society. Many of the projects promoted by the Commission establish regional and local networks to examine the effects on economic structures, on society and on Government.

One of the Scottish Parliament's key objectives is to bring government closer to the citizen, which is an important consideration, particularly in relation to matters about Europe and the European Union.

It can be seen from what I have said that relations with the European Union are extremely important for local government. Local government has a successful track record, but we must emphasise the need to work with the Scottish Parliament to pursue the collective interests of the Scottish people. The public sector in Scotland must work together if Scotland is to continue to have the good relationship with the European Union that it has enjoyed until now. A key part of that will be partnership between the Scottish Parliament, COSLA and Scottish local government.

I am happy to answer questions, convener.

The Convener: You have given us a comprehensive overview of COSLA's work. I am happy to throw the discussion open to members, but do either of the officers want to say something first?

Adrian Colwell (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): We will take questions during the discussion.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(SNP): Thank you, Christine, for your in-depth evidence. I, like the convener, am a former leader of a council. I am, therefore, a bit disappointed in the number of responses that we have received to our questionnaire: we have received four and four are yet to come, which is a low number. At this stage, that could be as much to do with the perception of this committee's role in the debate on Europe as anything, but how does COSLA think that we can increase the level of response for future consultation processes and ensure that we hear the real voice of Scottish local government? That is not meant to be disparaging to COSLA, but there are distinct voices out there that need to be heard.

Enlargement and the euro are two of the big issues that will affect Scotland in the future. At a time when the number of member states of the European Union is set to increase, how does COSLA believe that we can broaden the perspective of the European Union while deepening the Union to ensure that it lasts? It would also be useful to have a bigger steer on COSLA's view of the euro. How does local government see the euro?

The Convener: Do you want all that answered at one meeting, Bruce?

Bruce Crawford: I am sorry. I realise that I have asked a lot. I apologise if I have hogged things somewhat.

Councillor May: I will invite the officers to comment on those questions also. I am pleased to say that Fife Council is one of the councils that have responded to the questionnaire. I am not aware which others have responded. It may well be that the response that COSLA submitted encapsulated the views of many of the others. We must recognise that many local authorities are relatively small in size and do not have dedicated European officers. As a result, the service that COSLA provides as part of its role of core donation, pulling together and advising on European matters, is quite adequate for the purposes of many councils.

Bruce Crawford: I probably put you at a bit of a disadvantage by not telling you which councils had responded. Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Perth and Kinross and Stirling Councils have all responded, as one might have expected. However, I expected the city councils, in particular, to become involved in the discussion.

Adrian Colwell: In addition to lodging a response to the questionnaire, COSLA sent a copy of our European and international affairs work plan priorities for 1999-2000. There was extensive consultation on that document with officers and politicians of the 32 councils. That

may reinforce what Councillor May has said about why more councils have not responded. That is a point that we wish to raise with our council members directly as well as encouraging individual responses.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): Is there anything that we as a committee can do to reach your members? We would all complain if there were too many bureaucrats, but how can we make sure that a European attitude permeates all of a council's operations? How much time is given in COSLA's annual conference this year to the consideration of European matters?

The Convener: A number of Bruce's questions are still outstanding. On the question of the response from the councils, we should bear in mind that if every local authority in Scotland wanted to engage with us directly, we would find it hard to cope. It is useful to have COSLA to co-ordinate the response of Scottish local authorities and it gives a clear Scottish line that most, if not all, local authorities sign up to. I would not want to encourage anything that would detract from that; it is to everyone's benefit to have thorough debate in COSLA.

Councillor May: European issues often permeate councils through service committees, and frequently you find European matters being dealt with in varying ways. Of greatest importance is that local authorities play their part in developing the programmes that broaden local knowledge of European funding, institutions and opportunities.

I referred earlier to the work that COSLA has done on the structural and social funds and in developing partnerships on those. That is an area where it is more difficult to pull out responses to specific questions put in the committee's paper, but is, none the less, a very important part of the work of all Scottish local authorities. In terms of representing the collective Scottish view in Brussels, my experience of local authorities across the political spectrum is that they feel that they can all sign up to the COSLA position, once agreed, and they feel that their broad interests are represented by it.

On Mr Crawford's question on enlargement and the euro, again there are specific things that COSLA has done and can continue to do. It has perhaps not done as much yet on enlargement as remains to be done. When Irene Oldfather was in local government, she did a significant amount of work on the euro, producing a handbook and convening a number of seminars on it that formed the basis of many local authorities' work with their economic development partners, to give information to businesses.

It is through that kind of work, beginning in a policy paper at COSLA and going on to work in

individual authorities, that we can broaden and deepen the interest. This committee and the Scottish Parliament can usefully sign up to the partnership that existed before the Parliament with our political colleagues in the UK and across Europe. Dissemination of information, sharing of good practice and bringing the European ideals to bear on day-to-day policy planning underline how important membership of the European Union is to the Scottish economy, the Scottish way of life and the future development of Scotland.

I referred to the work that COSLA has already done on the euro. We have received a number of presentations from the Treasury on where the national information campaign and the national changeover plan are headed. Those presentations were very useful, and the information from them has gone out to local authorities. The Parliament might want to liaise formally with COSLA and local government on preparation for the euro. That would mean that when you have set your priorities—not just on the euro, but on other things—we will go forward with a work programme that involves us all pulling in the same direction.

14:30

Mr Jon Jordan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): COSLA does not have a view on when the single currency should be introduced; that is a matter for the UK Government. However, it is important that local government and business are prepared for the single currency, which already exists and affects our relationship with the euro zone. We must make our economic development services aware of the impact of the euro on exporters, so that they can prepare for it. Exporters will have to take strategic decisions when doing business with the euro zone.

We also need to be prepared for the impact that the UK's joining the euro would have on local government services. We run very complex information technology systems in our finance departments and have vast amounts of machinery that would need adaptation. The earlier we plan for the single currency, the more cost effectively we can carry out our preparations. We have tried to make that clear through the handbook that we have issued to member councils. We are not taking a view on the single currency but, as sensible and far-sighted public servants, we are preparing for any eventuality.

The Convener: Could you answer Margo's question, before I bring in Dennis Canavan and Irene Oldfather?

Ms MacDonald: It was on the specifics of the information campaign that is being directed at business. I am also a member of—

The Convener: No, I was referring to the

question that you had already asked. You are not getting a second bite of the cherry.

Ms MacDonald: I asked another question because I could see that I was not going to get an answer to my first one.

Councillor May: I would be delighted to answer Ms MacDonald's question. I am sure that she will recall that this year's COSLA conference was on the theme of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and its impact on political life in Scotland. Europe will be on the agenda for the conference that is scheduled for this year.

Ms MacDonald: Can I come?

Councillor May: We would be delighted to see you.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Could you explain the role of COSLA in determining the membership of certain European bodies, such as the Committee of the Regions and the consortia? I am referring to the East of Scotland European Consortium and the West of Scotland European Consortium, which scrutinise applications for European funding and have a considerable say in deciding whether a project satisfies the criteria and how much money it should be awarded. Is COSLA consulted about the membership of those important bodies? Is there a case for their membership being decided by a more democratic process?

Councillor May: I can respond to your question with regard to the Committee of the Regions, because I am very familiar with that. I will come back to the other matters that you raised in a moment.

The current mandate of the Committee of the Regions was agreed before the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. For that reason, its UK contingent was made up of representatives of local government. In Scotland, COSLA made nominations to those positions to the Secretary of State for Scotland at one of its full meetings. The secretary of state agreed the nominations and forwarded them to the UK Government for approval.

Given that the Scottish Parliament now exists, we do not know what will happen in the next mandate. In our submission to McIntosh, who consulted on European matters, I expressed the view that there should be parity: half of the places should be allotted to the Scottish Parliament, and the other half to local government. However, as far as I am aware, it has been agreed that the current representation will remain until the end of its four-year term.

I think that you may be confusing the east of Scotland European partnership and the west of Scotland European partnership with the consortia

that you mentioned, which are different organisations. I will ask one of the officers to comment in detail on the selection process for the partnerships, but I was pleased to note that Jack McConnell, the Minister for Finance, recently agreed that their membership should be extended to democratically elected political representatives.

Adrian Colwell: At present, local authorities in the east and west of Scotland and in the Highlands and Islands are directly involved in the regional programme partnerships, which both develop the strategies that will be implemented up to the end of this year and have a say in deciding which projects should be funded. The partnerships include local enterprise companies, colleges, universities, the voluntary sector and so on.

In a press release of 12 October, Mr McConnell announced that in the next phase of programming, starting in January 2000, the programme monitoring committee—the strategic body of the partnerships—would be opened up to elected members. The Executive has started a process of consultation about how that should be implemented. Like you, we are formulating ideas about how we would like the new system to operate, while retaining the essential principle of the programmes—partnership between different sectors—and ensuring that the projects are directly relevant both to the programme and to the needs of the area.

Dennis Canavan: Would not some of your councillor colleagues feel annoyed about members of the Scottish Parliament becoming members of the Committee of the Regions, given that a separate body, consisting of representatives of devolved parliaments and legislative assemblies in member states of the European Union, is likely to be established? That would mean that it would be possible for members of this Parliament to be members of two European bodies, whereas councillors could be members only of one.

Councillor May: I would love to think that we could say to the Scottish Parliament, “Go away. You are not having any of our places”. I doubt that that would be right or even desirable. We must not confuse the body to which Dennis Canavan refers, which would be made up of representatives of directly elected local and regional governments, with the Committee of the Regions. The COR was established under the Maastricht treaty and has the statutory right to be consulted in a number of areas by both the Parliament and the Commission; its functions were extended by the Treaty of Amsterdam. The other body that was mentioned may make its views known, but does not have the same statutory rights of consultation.

Elected members of regional governments from right across the European Union are represented on the Committee of the Regions. Much as I would

like to keep membership to ourselves in local government, it is almost inevitable—and quite right—that the Scottish Parliament would wish to be represented on that committee, and I believe that it should be.

The Convener: Historically, the UK has been the sole country with only local government representation on the Committee of the Regions, as every other country has both regional and local government representation. It would be helpful for this committee if we could obtain a glossary of all the relevant bodies in Scotland, the UK and Europe, with a description of what they do and how we might influence them. We could use that as a starting point for a future discussion and for an examination of some of the local bodies that make decisions about funding, such as those that Dennis Canavan spoke about.

We will also want to take the opportunity to have a discussion on the future composition and role of the steering committee headed by Lex Gold. I do not know whether we can have that discussion at the next meeting, but we will try to get some input on that process at a future meeting, Dennis. The clerk has a note of that.

Councillor May: Dennis Canavan raised two interesting points, one of which was on the work of the programme monitoring committees and the partnerships. We must be clear that this is likely to be the last time that we receive European funding at the present level; the outcomes of what we do with that funding must be tangible, accountable and measurable. It is important that the Scottish Parliament sets out its key policy areas early as that will enable us to be absolutely clear that the programmes that are to be put in place are in line with the priorities of this Parliament and the UK Government, so that we get the maximum value from all the public resources.

On the second point, we should become members of those organisations across Europe that assist elected Governments, at whatever level, in the achievement of their objectives. The Assembly of the European Regions can be a useful body as long as its priorities and objectives agree with one's own priorities and objectives, which also applies to the North Sea Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the new organisation that Dennis spoke of. I see nothing wrong with multiple memberships of these organisations, as long as we benefit from them.

The Convener: It will be useful for us to increase our monitoring role in the work of the programme management committees. We will need to build that into our work load.

Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I had originally intended to pick up the point on local authority responses to the consultation

exercise, but a few points have been raised since then. On my original point, many local authorities see Europe as a specialist area and subscribe to the expert experience of organisations such as COSLA. I note that the West of Scotland European Consortium and the East of Scotland European Consortium both responded to the consultation process. They bring an additional regional representation that some local authorities feel is necessary. Therefore, I can understand why some local authorities may not have responded to our questionnaire.

COSLA brings a wealth of experience, particularly on the euro, and it is important that we do not try to reinvent the wheel on that issue. Can we explore with COSLA how to bring a distinctive political aspect to that debate? As Jon outlined, COSLA does not have a view on whether we should go in or stay out of the euro, but it has a fundamental role on the ground, liaising with local authorities throughout Scotland. It would be useful to explore the added value that the European Committee and the Scottish Parliament could bring to that debate without reinventing and going over the good work that has been done. We should capitalise on existing experience.

Adrian Colwell: I want to respond to Ms Oldfather's first point. It is fair to say that European affairs in local government tend to be seen in terms of particular funding issues, international liaison and so on. However, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that Jon Jordan and I, with our other colleagues in Brussels and at Rosebery House in Edinburgh, are in contact with a range of offices across local government—equal opportunities, trading standards, environmental services and so on. There is an extensive two-way process on what draft proposals mean for local government, which in turn feeds views into the Scottish Executive, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

We have been trying, particularly since reorganisation in 1996, to mainstream the approach so that the EU is seen not as separate and distant but as integral to service delivery. We still have a lot more to do to encourage that view but it is fair to say that we are well on the way.

14:45

The Convener: Let us move on.

Ms Oldfather: Can I just raise my second point about the euro?

Councillor May: I entirely take on board Irene's point about the work that has been done on the euro. In areas where we are trying to get a common Scottish position, within a UK position, the question is not which body should take the lead, but what we can do at our level to take

forward the agenda. It is important that we have co-operation across levels of government and between officers within the various organisations.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am impressed by the paper and the work that is being done in co-operation. I have always found COSLA a bit of a mystery, because I was only once invited to anything that it organised, despite my long political career—maybe that is because I am not acceptable politically. That is why I asked whether we could all go to COSLA's next conference on Europe.

On the Committee of the Regions, I will make a parallel and avoid nice phrases such as "taking forward together". When I first joined the European Parliament, members were all nominated—we were elected as members of parliaments but nominated to the European Parliament. I was part of the successful movement for direct elections to the European Parliament. I was president of the European Free Alliance, which contained members from 17 democratic parties from all parts of Europe. We fought hard for the Committee of the Regions, but realised that people might want it to contain an outstanding person who had been elected to local government—that person would be nominated to the committee. Do you foresee that the committee will be directly elected?

I was on the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, which I found difficult as I am not an economist. We struggled to come to a view on the euro. I find it strange that COSLA does not have a view, but just uses phrases like "go forward together", "co-operate", "discuss". Have you no view on whether the euro is a good thing or a bad thing? There is too much political speech and not enough clarity. COSLA should take a view, as it consists of elected politicians. Is it trying to please the Government, which has a muddled view? At least that muddled view is better than the Opposition's—the Conservatives seem to have closed the door to the euro.

My final question—

The Convener: No, hold on.

Dr Ewing: Okay, that is enough.

Councillor May: Direct elections to the Committee of the Regions may come. The Committee of the Regions is in its second mandate and is only now beginning to clarify its direction and work programme and to establish itself on a basis of agreed cross-party political priorities. That is a great advance on the first mandate. As with all things, there will be evolution. There may be direct elections, but that may be in the context of the process of establishing regional chambers across the rest of the United Kingdom. We will need to consider how the representation is gathered.

Winnie Ewing asks why COSLA does not take a view on the euro. Entry into the euro is a matter for the Government of the day—it must decide when the economic criteria are right. If local government takes a party political view, I am not sure that that will advance the debate. Within my region, there is a divergence of opinion among small and large employers and manufacturers about whether entry to the euro would be a good thing. Most of them agree that what the Government is doing, in setting out the changeover framework, is an acceptable way of planning. They also agree that we should not go in when the economic conditions are wrong, as happened when we joined the exchange rate mechanism. I have not heard many businesses—and they will be the ones most directly affected—saying that the Government approach is wrong for them.

Dr Ewing: What about fish exporters?

The Convener: We must not get into a two-person debate. A number of members want to speak.

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): My comment is not on fish exporters, but on jobs, a subject that I am sure members will agree is fundamental to why we are here. My remarks touch on a point that Dennis Canavan raised and that Christine May mentioned in relation to the finite nature of structural funds. I am concerned that the outcomes should not only match the criteria that Christine outlined but be sustainable in the longer term. This committee, like COSLA, has spent much of the past three months in discussions with the Executive on the content of the structural funds plan. That is now away; whether it comes back in the form in which it went is anybody's guess.

As I believe that job creation is a key element of the output from the structural programme and as we are about to embark on a new phase in the national employment action plan, I share the view that current programmes do not place sufficient emphasis on regional and local levels. The plan should have greater emphasis on regional and local employment policy initiatives. How will COSLA work with the Parliament to finalise those objectives in terms of the structural funds and the draft employment plan?

Councillor May: COSLA will work with the Executive to establish the vision that it wants to see at the end of the process. It is important that jobs are sustainable. Not only must jobs be created, but potential employees must be trained and given the skills to take those jobs. Employers need to be encouraged—or legislation needs to oblige them—to train their employees and to make training and lifelong learning an on-going part of their business development.

In those areas that have transitional funding—areas that have now fallen out of objective 2 status, for example—we understand that we are more likely to get infrastructure capital programme support. Those are the areas in which we must concentrate our efforts in using infrastructure support; we must use the support given for the other areas for non-infrastructure matters and capacity building.

Allan Wilson: What is the optimum means by which that process can be influenced? That is what Dennis Canavan was getting at. How can the Scottish Parliament and COSLA develop those strategic objectives at a local level?

Jon Jordan: The European Commission wants much more local and regional involvement in the next series of national employment action plans. We must work closely with the Commission to ensure that that happens. At a European level, we can join the CEMR campaign “Act locally for employment”, which promotes local and regional action. One of the major initiatives is to show the flexibility of working at local and regional level. The UK labour market is not unified; we have regional and local labour markets. If we are to be successful, our policies must be tailored to those local and regional variations. We need to give strong examples of where action at local and regional level has been extremely effective.

Ms MacDonald: I want to ask about the information coming through local authorities to businesses about preparation for the euro. Does COSLA have primary responsibility for that? Does COSLA have a partnership with the local enterprise companies? As a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, I am interested in how that information is being passed on and who fits in where, because so many businesses report that they are not ready for the euro and do not understand a lot of what is happening.

Jon Jordan: The Scottish Euro Forum, which has private and public sector partners—including Scottish Enterprise, the LECs, COSLA and the Confederation of British Industry business forums—has been very successful. Businesses can get in touch with the Scottish Euro Forum via a freephone line to get specialist advice on working in euros.

I find that the relationship with LECs differs from local authority to local authority. In some cases, the local authority works closely with the LECs, but the LECs take the lead on euro issues. In others, the local authority has a group of clients and the LEC has another group of clients, but both sides work together closely on trade development centres. There is great local variation in how economic development services are organised in Scotland, but the important thing is to put out the

euro forum information through economic development services and the LECs.

Ms Oldfather: On that point—

The Convener: Hold on, Irene. We are running over time. Christine, did you want to add something?

Councillor May: The Scottish Council Development and Industry is doing a significant amount of work to gather information on business preparedness for the euro and to give information back to business. SCDI has produced some very useful documentation.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I was interested in what Adrian Colwell said about mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is important, but we are a long way from it. The man in the street does not see local government as having a role in European issues. Despite what everyone has said today, I am concerned that local authorities are passing responsibility for dealing with European issues to COSLA. The individual councillors of all persuasions that I have met do not perceive European issues as being in the main stream.

Councillor May: I am not sure that that is the case. If you ask councils about European issues, they will probably say that they leave them to X or Y, who is the European expert. However, if you ask them to tell you about the projects in their ward that have received European funding, they will often be able to name not only the projects, but the individuals who have been involved in them and—if they have been a councillor for some time—the extent of their own involvement.

That goes back to what Adrian Colwell said about mainstreaming; it means not that the councillor is seen as the sad anorak who knows everything about all aspects of European legislation, but that membership of the European Union and the benefits and opportunities flowing from it are seen as part of everyday life. When one asks people, "What do you think of the Government?" they will tell you that politicians are all rubbish. If one asks them, "What do you think of x service or y service?" they will tell you how good those services are. We must ensure that people think not in terms of European issues, but in terms of the benefits and opportunities that come from membership of the European Union.

15:00

The Convener: That is a good note on which to finish this item. In some of our early meetings—and this will apply when we come to discuss our future work programme—we have been keen to ensure that our relationship with Europe is seen not only in terms of the money that we receive from the structural funds programme, but in terms

of the broader European agenda that we can engage in, be influenced by and learn from. Councillor May makes a good point.

On behalf of the committee, I thank Councillor May and her colleagues from COSLA for coming along. I expect that this will not be the last time that we hear from you. I hope that, as we develop our future work programme, we can engage with you as one of the important partners in Scottish civic life. Thank you once again.

Councillor May: Thank you, convener. I will leave you a copy of our work programme and hope that, in drawing up your own, you might refer to it.

The Convener: I will ask Bruce Crawford for a synopsis by 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

David Mundell: He will multiply it by nine.

Work Programme

The Convener: We have circulated a private draft paper with some suggestions for the work programme. I do not want to take any decisions on the content of that paper today. Its purpose is to inform members and to stimulate suggestions. We can put any suggestions into a final draft, for decision making at the next meeting.

Stephen Imrie (Committee Clerk): I shall advise the committee on the contents of the paper and how it was developed. Some 57 responses have been received as part of the consultation exercise; another 14 or so are still to come. The clerks have read the responses and highlighted some common themes. Members will find those themes in section 5 of the private briefing paper, on page 4. The next step, as I understand it, will be to invite a select group of the organisations to address the committee on the detail of the consultation, as COSLA has done today. That process will probably begin in the next meeting and continue into the early part of next year. There is little more for me to say on that, except to refer members to section 5 for the key issues that have been identified so far.

The Convener: Any thoughts?

Ms Oldfather: The timetable, which has to cover a fairly wide range of issues, seems to be rather truncated. Should we not perhaps be considering a two-year timetable?

The Convener: We can bear that in mind.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): On a similar point, the draft is heading in the right direction, in terms of covering all the issues that we need to address.

Irene Oldfather is right. The agenda is huge; if

we want to do it justice, we should identify the priority areas that we need to deal with in the first six months, bearing in mind the fact that we will have a bit of time in which to explore some of the other topics in more detail.

The Convener: I hope that members will have suggestions about priorities.

Dennis Canavan: I agree with Irene Oldfather and Cathy Jamieson. If we are to do justice to the suggested programme of issues in only six months, we should pick out perhaps three or four topics rather than eight or nine—even three or four might be ambitious.

Section 2 of the paper deals with the three-strand approach. The first is scrutiny. We have to scrutinise; that is part of our duty under standing orders. The second strand is headed “Consultation”, but I am not sure that that is the best word for what is meant. Are we not talking about interaction with the Executive? Halfway down page 2 of the paper, consultation is used in a different context. The paper says that strand 3 will

“most benefit from the consultation exercise”.

Moreover, section 4 is entitled, “Consultation Exercise: Update and Next Steps”. I suspect that whoever drafted the paper used the word consultation in a different sense from the one used to describe strand 2. A better title for strand 2 would be “Relationships with the Executive” or “Interaction with the Executive”.

Page 3 shows a matrix or grid containing six topics, but some issues seem to be missing. I am thinking of human rights and international development, although they might come under the title “Third Sector”, as many voluntary organisations are concerned with those issues. Those are important topics, which I referred to in my letter—the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities submission also mentioned them.

Between now and Christmas, we must prioritise what we will do, as it will be far too ambitious to pick eight or nine topics.

The Convener: We will make those decisions at the next meeting. Today we have the opportunity to suggest any topics that we think have been left out and should be included in the final draft.

Dennis Canavan’s suggestion that we should reword the paragraph headed “Consultation” is well made. We will try to do that in the final draft.

There is a difficulty with human rights matters. I am advised that issues relating to the European Court of Human Rights are outwith the committee’s remit. I think that we will find ways from time to time in which to consider some of those issues, but we will need to think about that

carefully.

Dennis Canavan: I meant to raise that point with you. Are we not allowed to impinge on the work of the Council of Europe, as distinct from the European Union? One of the suggested topics is justice and home affairs. People imagine that many matters that have come before the Parliament, such as the removal of temporary sheriffs, emanate from the European Union, but that is not correct. There is a European dimension but, as I understand it, these matters emanate from the Council of Europe and the European convention on human rights. Surely the European Committee can consider such issues.

The Convener: That would depend on what the issues were. The standing orders state:

“The remit of the committee is to consider and report on—

- a) proposals for European Communities legislation;
- b) the implementation of European Communities legislation; and
- c) any European Communities or European Union issue.”

Where something is an issue for the European Communities or the European Union, we can consider it, but if it is something for the European Court of Human Rights or the Council of Europe, we cannot. I would hazard a guess that most of the issues that they address will also be for the European Communities or the European Union, and that would be the way we would look at it.

Dennis Canavan: Perhaps we could get round it by saying—I think I am right—that every member of the European Union is also a member of the Council of Europe, so any decision that it takes impinges on European law as well as the law of each member state.

The Convener: It would be hard to imagine that a matter for the Council of Europe or the European Court of Human Rights would not be a matter for the European Communities or the European Union. The standing orders do not include the bodies that you mention, but I think that we can be flexible when required; if there is a problem, no doubt the lawyers will tell us. We can get advice on that, but it should not delay our work programme, and we will deal with any obstacles when we meet them.

Allan Wilson: I prefer the use of the term “engagement” to “consultation”. We should include the draft national employment plan in our work programme. The rest of the draft is okay.

Bruce Crawford: I have written to the convener about structural funds and additionality, asking for a joint discussion between the Finance Committee and the European Committee. All I want to say at this stage is that I would like to hold that idea in

reserve, depending on whether it will be an area of work for this committee.

On page 2, under "Scrutiny", the paper refers to "the forward intelligence network in Brussels and a close working relationship".

Forward intelligence is the key to influencing EU legislation, rather than the reactive process that seems to be suggested.

The paper also states on page 2:

"the first two strands of the committee's general strategy and workload are in a sense set by others and the committee will fit into the debate as appropriate."

Is there not a case for us setting the agenda ourselves?

The Convener: I know what you are saying on the broader suggested programme.

Bruce Crawford: My point is that forward intelligence is obviously the key to influencing EU legislation, otherwise we are simply reacting to it.

The Convener: That is clear—for example, we will have an item later on the EU budget, but it is obvious that, although we are asking people to comment on that, it is too late. We need to get into the process earlier, a point that Winnie Ewing made at previous meetings. We could strengthen that.

Bruce Crawford: The first unnumbered paragraph on page 2 of the paper states:

"the committee will fit into the debate"—

which seems to suggest that we are allowing others to set the agenda for us. The committee should set the agenda for itself.

15:15

The Convener: We will consider whether there is another way of wording that.

Bruce Crawford: On the "Suggested Programme of Issues"—that is, our work load—and paragraph 5.1, "Enlargement of the EU and the challenges facing Scotland", I am a bit worried about the institutional implications of enlargement for Scotland and, in particular, about the reduction in the number of MEPs. Scotland has a small number of MEPs compared with other small European countries; we might wish to consider that.

On paragraph 5.2, "The role for, and potential impacts of, a single currency in Scotland", there is no mention of Scottish banknotes and the euro. The Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers is lobbying for the right to produce Scottish euros—should not we be considering that?

The Convener: If we decide that those issues

are priorities, whoever considers them will no doubt wish to take those details into account. We should not try to write a detailed report now. The paper contains suggestions for consideration only. Are you broadly in agreement with those topics?

Bruce Crawford: Will the suggestions not debar consideration of further issues at a later date?

The Convener: No, they are not prescriptive.

Ms MacDonald: For the next six months, can we take on a big, specific topic, such as what is happening to the European Union? The last part of COSLA's submission said that enlargement would change fundamentally the very nature of the Union. We should consider what we mean by enlargement, as it is a big responsibility.

The Convener: We are not deciding today which issues we will take on. I repeat: we have a list of suggestions for members to consider. If members think of issues that are not identified in the paper, they should suggest them now and we can consider them at the next meeting. However, Dennis Canavan, Cathy Jamieson and others have already suggested that some of those topics are so large that we would find it difficult to cope with them, to address your point, Margo. However, we will consider them and we will not be prescriptive. The paper suggests the type of issues that might be considered, but, no doubt, once rapporteurs have been appointed, other issues will be raised. We will try to be as specific as we can, but we do not wish to be prescriptive.

Dr Winnie Ewing: Is forestry included under agriculture? When will we know how we will go about appointing the reporters? I nearly said rapporteurs.

The Convener: We will discuss that at the next meeting. The committee clerks are still working on agriculture and fisheries issues, which will include forestry.

Dr Ewing: Forestry is quite important in European legislation.

The Convener: Yes.

David Mundell: May I ask the clerk, through the chair, whether, in the submissions that we have received, any groups have questioned the rationale of this exercise or have a different view of how we should progress it?

Stephen Imrie: Are you referring to views on the process of developing our work programme?

David Mundell: Yes.

Stephen Imrie: The answer is no. There is a broadly similar view, with few exceptions, on both the committee's general role and the issues that it should be considering.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): This document is a brilliant start. I am sure that we would not have been able to proceed so quickly if the first draft had not been so good.

My first point follows on from what Dennis Canavan has said. On page 2, the paragraph headed "Consultation" should perhaps be divided into two. We need to respond to matters that the Scottish Executive raises but, as has been said, it is important for us to be proactive. In addition, paragraph 3, entitled "Wider Issues", does not follow from the first two points, "Scrutiny" and "Consultation"; it is not in the same category. That may need a wee bit of thought. It might be possible to include that point under the heading "Consultation". We need to ask ourselves what we will be consulting on.

Point 3 on page 4 refers to mainstreaming, which seems to be about our linking up with the various committees of the Parliament. However, page 5 deals with individual committees. Perhaps points 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 could be subsumed under point 3 to make the order a bit more logical.

Ms Oldfather: I agree. I have made notes about point 6—language issues—because I have asked questions in the Parliament on some of the matters listed there. There is quite a big overlap between the remit of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and point 6 of the document. If our aim is to mainstream, perhaps we should be tackling these issues rather differently.

Ms MacDonald: Irene Oldfather's point does not apply only to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, as point 6 asks

"What benefits would there be to businesses, especially in relation to exports".

Some of the work could be split up and remitted to other committees. I always think that we should send it to forestry.

The Convener: We will need to be careful. At previous meetings, we expressed the aspiration to be involved in some of the broader issues, not just to refer things to the relevant committee. If we say that all education-related items are a matter for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, or that all enterprise items with a European dimension are a matter for the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, we will narrow down our role. This is all about getting the appropriate balance and the appropriate working relationship with other committees. I think that Sylvia Jackson is making a slightly different point.

Dr Jackson: Yes. My point was that point 3 on page 4 needs to be expanded. It deals with the process of mainstreaming, but Margo Macdonald is asking more about how we can get at the nitty-gritty of the key issues with other committees.

Ms MacDonald: I think that, to some extent, we have taken a decision to speak in tongues. We have decided that it is a good idea for people to do business in the same language as the Greek with whom they are trying to do business. That means that we have to tell the business folk and the educationalists that they have a job of work to do. We are the lead committee on this and we are saying that they must come up with ideas.

The Convener: There will be occasions when we want to work with other committees—there is an item later in today's agenda on which I will suggest that we work closely with the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. What we have attempted to say in this document is that it is legitimate for this committee to assume a broader advocacy role in European matters. Our role should not be purely reactive, or limited to giving views on matters that are put before us. We want to encourage a better understanding of the European agenda. That means that we must foster debate and engage actively with and promote European issues. We probably need to use a stronger word than dissemination to indicate the direction that we want to take.

Do Sylvia or Margo have anything specific to suggest for the draft?

Dr Jackson: The third point, on page 2, should perhaps be called advocacy.

The Convener: We will reword that.

Ms MacDonald: As I have explained, there are two or three issues here. This is a terrific first draft, with very clear thinking. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The spelling is right as well.

We should start as we mean to go on. We could say that the way in which to tackle this, that and the next thing would be to disseminate them to other committees or groups. I do not want to lose sight of the fundamental point, which is that we should be discussing the effects of EU enlargement.

The Convener: I am struggling to understand the change to the paper that will encapsulate your comments.

Ms Oldfather: On point 6 of section 5, I know that a modern languages working party has been examining the teaching of modern languages in secondary schools in Scotland. I asked a question on the prospect of a pilot project on the immersion teaching of foreign languages.

It is possible that members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, or the Scottish Executive, have more knowledge about this matter than we do. We have role to play but, when we have such a big agenda, must we reinvent the wheel? We will examine wider issues, too, but I imagine that the working party that is examining

how to improve foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools will have considered how foreign languages are taught in Europe and best practice abroad.

The Convener: The concluding paragraph of section 5 states:

"Please also note that consideration of the role and remit of other subject committees of the Parliament needs to be taken before agreeing the list of issues".

We will have to return to that debate, but there is nothing to stop us as a committee saying, "Here is the broad objective that we believe is important from a European perspective. We want to know what you, as another committee, are doing to assist in achieving that objective." That is not inconsistent with what we have said; it does not mean that we will do all the work—other committees will do some of it. When we come to appoint rapporteurs, some of those issues will be taken forward.

Cathy Jamieson: I think that, as Sylvia Jackson said, points 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of section 5 link with point 3, on page 4, about mainstreaming European issues. It would be simpler if, rather than going into all the detail, we made those points into subsections of point 3. That would solve the problem of how we dealt with the matter in the paper. We can discuss the detail later.

Dr Jackson: Section 2 should contain a fourth point on our relationship with other committees.

The Convener: We will see whether we can add that. We will also consider Cathy Jamieson's comments.

Allan Wilson: Is it the intention that we produce a short, medium and longer-term programme in which we prioritise the range of issues to be discussed?

The Convener: Yes, we could do that.

Ms MacDonald: If we have long-term, on-going monitoring and discussion at the same time as—in the shorter term—we ask for information from, or joint meetings with, other committees of the Parliament, we will be running to two different time scales. Is that how we will both establish the over-arching philosophical approach to our role in the new enlarged Europe and work out how to teach the weans to speak French?

Dr Ewing: Or Gaelic.

The Convener: The paper is not meant to resolve all the details immediately. After we have set the broad objectives, we will start to allocate work. As part of the process, we need to consider how we engage with other committees and how they can help us to fulfil our broad objectives. A number of useful suggestions have been made about where the emphasis should be and about

some of the detail. We will have another chance to go through the document when the paper is redrafted. Is there anything else?

15:30

Dennis Canavan: Our first function is to scrutinise. The draft report suggests an early warning system, or forward intelligence network, in Brussels so that we are not left merely scrutinising something when it is almost a fait accompli. Perhaps the clerk can advise us on how we could set up such a network. Would it be done through Scotland House, the European Parliament and its committees, the European Commission in Brussels or through the Commission's offices in the UK? The Commission has an office in Edinburgh. What is the best way to proceed?

The Convener: Stephen Imrie suggests that it could be done through all those bodies. The other issue that needs to be considered is the fact that we have a different role from the Scottish Executive. While we appreciate the co-operation that the Scottish Executive has given us so far, not only in Edinburgh, but in Brussels, there will be times when it is appropriate for us to have access to our own support. At some point, we may need to consider having a representative office in Brussels so that we can get independent analysis and information. Perhaps we could work in partnership with COSLA, helping it to invest in or expand the work that it does. I do not want to belittle the work carried out by the Scottish Executive, but we need to recognise that there will be times when our roles have to be different. We may need to put down a marker and come back to this issue. A discussion with COSLA could be helpful.

Ms Oldfather: In one of our previous meetings—in August or September—I suggested that we examine the European Commission's legislative programme. At the time, the Commission was planning next year's programme. It would be helpful for the committee to have that information.

We will not be able to do this today, but at a future meeting we may also want to consider the Committee of the Regions' forward work programme and establish how we can build some of its work and forthcoming reports into our discussions. Last week, I finished a report for the Committee of the Regions, but there was not really an opportunity to bring it to the European Committee.

The Convener: I hesitate to inundate the committee with a huge volume of information, not all of which will be relevant. We may occasionally need to examine the work of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the

Committee of the Regions to get advance warning of what is relevant. The committee should discuss its relationship with a range of organisations and how we can feed into them.

Dr Jackson: If we want to expand our general strategy to include a fourth strand, covering our relationship with other committees in the Scottish Parliament, could not we extend it to include our relationship with other organisations in Europe, as Dennis Canavan suggested?

The Convener: We have agreed that we will ask for a document that indicates what all the different bodies in Scotland, the UK and Europe do. At some point, it would be helpful for someone to take us through that. Today, I gave Stephen Imrie a flow chart produced by the Local Government International Bureau in London, which shows the decision-making process in Europe. It will be to the good if, as part of our learning process, we have another discussion about this so that we can begin to find out when decisions are made and—as Irene Oldfather says—to feed information in from the Commission, the Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and others. Dennis Canavan's point can be covered by that.

Bruce Crawford: I heard someone say that, next week, we would be talking about reporters and considering who would do what.

The Convener: If we can agree the detail of the document, we could start to look at that. If we cannot get round to it, it would need to slip to the meeting after next.

Bruce Crawford: I want to know what process we will use to get there; a discussion about who will do what could be interesting. I do not know how we are going to manage it. Has any one given any thought to it?

The Convener: Yes, I have given some thought to it and—in the spirit of the Parliament—we will be as fair as we can. The priority is to agree on the principles and programme and—if necessary—to take a step back and agree on the principles of how we allocate the work. It will not help if we squabble over who does what. At the same time, we need to agree on the process.

Bruce Crawford: As long as you give us what we want, I am sure that we will not squabble.

The Convener: I have seen you in action before, Bruce. I know exactly what you mean.

Is there anything else that has not been included? I echo the comments made by members of the committee in thanking Stephen Imrie and the members of his team for their work. We will try to tidy this up and produce a paper for consideration at the next meeting. We will also make some suggestions about the allocation of

the rapporteurships. Some people have already expressed an interest; they will not always be accommodated entirely, but we will try to do so as much as possible.

Dr Ewing: That is jumping the gun, is it not?

The Convener: Sorry?

Dr Ewing: We could all express an interest if we thought that now was the appropriate time, but I did not know that people had already done so.

The Convener: I am puzzled, Winnie, because we have at least twice asked committee members to express their interest. It is possible that that has not registered, but everybody has had the opportunity to express an interest. I will say it a third, if not a fourth time. The fact that people have been asked to express their interest does not mean that any decisions have been made.

Bruce Crawford: To be fair, Hugh, we did not have a chart that laid out the areas before.

The Convener: We suggested that people could express their interest in broad terms. It is rather petty to start making complaints about that, as everybody was in the same boat. The people who responded have clearly used some initiative, but that does not mean that they will get the area in which they have expressed interest. The suggestion was an attempt by the clerks—quite rightly—to gauge people's interests. I do not think that it was jumping the gun.

Dr Ewing: I did not receive a letter from the clerks about that.

The Convener: We discussed it more than once, Winnie. I am sorry.

Ms MacDonald: That is what you get for being polite, Winnie.

Dr Ewing: I am not polite. I just wait until I see what the subjects are before I say which one I would like. That is quite reasonable.

The Convener: Let us leave it at that—we are quite clear about what we have asked. The intention was to try to extend some courtesy and to engage members. If that has not worked, that is unfortunate. The committee will make the final decision at a future date.

Scrutiny

The Convener: Let us move on to the scrutiny process and go through the documents.

The first is document 346 (EC Ref No 10736/99, COM(99)388 final). We have just received the Scottish cover note, and the recommendation is for no further action to be taken. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We are still awaiting an explanatory memorandum on document 349 (EC Ref No 10251/99, SEC(99)1213).

We are also still awaiting an explanatory memorandum on document 350 (EC Ref No 10742/99, COM(99)348 final), but there is a mistake in the sift note. The suggested referral should be to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, not to the Rural Affairs Committee.

Ms MacDonald: Why not send it to them anyway and see whether they notice? [*Laughter.*]

The Convener: We have received a Scottish cover note on document 376 (EC Ref No 11024/99, COM(99)368 final), which suggests no further action.

We also have a Scottish cover note on document 377 (EC Ref No 11025/99, COM(99)437 final). The suggestion is that we refer the document to the Rural Affairs Committee.

Dr Winnie Ewing: We are very glad to have this note. It is a hopeful sign that we are considering the Norwegian experience, because they have been much more successful in dealing with fish diseases than we have in the United Kingdom. We cannot come to any conclusion because there is to be another meeting of the Fisheries Council; but we should keep the issue very much in mind, because it is fundamental, especially in the Highlands. We should keep our eye on it, but the news so far is very good.

The Convener: Shall we refer this to the Rural Affairs Committee?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Document 393—

Dennis Canavan: Is that not the sort of thing that should be debated on the floor of the House, as it were, in plenary session?

The Convener: We have written to Scottish members of the European Parliament, and we have had replies from at least one. Bill Miller has suggested that one thing that we might want to consider doing next year is getting into the process earlier. He feels that, at the moment, we are coming into the process a bit too late. Winnie has made a similar point on that and other matters before. As far as this item is concerned, it is probably too late for that, but we would—

Dr Ewing: It is not too late; that is the whole point of what we are saying.

The Convener: Well, the second reading—

Dr Ewing: We are looking again at the whole way of dealing with infectious salmon anaemia.

The Convener: No, we are on a different subject now. We are on document 393, which is a draft general budget of the European Communities.

Dr Ewing: I am sorry. I was looking at document 377 on the control of fish diseases.

Ms MacDonald: There will be meetings in a couple of days' time for that.

Dr Ewing: That is right. Okay.

The Convener: Although I think that there is nothing for us to do on documents 411 (EC Ref No 11084/99, COPEN 37), 412 (EC Ref No 11570/99, COPEN 42), 413 (EC Ref No 11571/99, COPEN 43), 414 (EC Ref No 11603/99, COPEN 44) and 437 (EC Ref No 12010/99 COPEN 47 COMIX 344) at the moment, an issue arises that we should perhaps consider along with the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. I suggest that, in the first instance, I have a meeting with the convener to see whether we need to have some joint debate and consideration, or, if necessary, a joint meeting. There are a number of significant issues for the Scottish Parliament that go beyond this committee. We should ensure that all the justice matters are being looked at adequately. Do members have any suggestions on how to proceed with that?

Ms MacDonald: I have a specific interest in the interception of telecommunications, which is the subject of 413. It is important to establish where the Scottish criminal justice system fits into the concordats and the fault lines between the two Parliaments.

15:45

The Convener: I shall bring forward a recommendation once I have discussed with the convener of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee whether there should be joint deliberation, either between individual members or in a joint committee meeting. If members are agreed, that is the best way forward.

Document 437 falls into the same category as the previous documents on mutual assistance in criminal matters, and we are advised to take no action at this stage. That is agreed.

For document 417 (EC Ref No 11492/99, COM(99) 425 final), we are still awaiting information from the Executive, so we are advised to take no action at this stage.

For document 422 (EC Ref No 11156/99, SEC(99) 1302 final), a cover note has been requested and the document will be referred to the Transport and the Environment Committee for routine scrutiny.

The committee recommended that no further

action be taken on the following documents:

SP 440 (EC Ref No 11766/99, COM(99) 473 final)

SP 441 (EC Ref No 11767/99, COM (99) 472 final)

The Convener: For document 447 (EC Ref No 10525/99 COM(99) 429 final), we are awaiting information and no action is required at this stage. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 450 (EC Ref No 11921/99 COM (99) 480 final)

SP 451 (EC Ref No 12042/99 COM (99) 463 final)

The Convener: Members will note that some of these documents are being sent to other committees for their interest, but no further action will be taken as far as this committee is concerned.

Dennis Canavan: What is the difference between referring a document to another committee and simply sending a copy to another committee?

Stephen Imrie: If we formally refer a document to another committee, we require that committee to put it on its agenda, consider it and report back to us. If we copy it to another committee, we copy it to the clerk and the convener, who will decide whether it contains anything worth considering. I suspect that, more often than not, they decide that there is not. We copy documents to them just to keep them aware of what is going on.

Dennis Canavan: If we simply send them a copy, can they still take up the issue if they think that it merits further study and action?

Stephen Imrie: Yes.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following document:

SP 452 (EC Ref No COM (99) 349 final)

The Convener: For document 453 (EC Ref No 10844/1/99, REV.1), a cover note has been requested. The document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document 454 (EC Ref 12322/99, COPEN 48), the Scottish cover note has arrived. The recommendation is that no further action be taken. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 455 (EC Ref No 12033/99, SEC(99) 1596 final)

SP 456 (EC Ref No 12053/99, COM(99) 500 final)

SP 457 (EC Ref No 12062/99, COM(99) 503 final)

SP 458 (EC Ref No 12064/99, COM(99) 505 final)

SP 459 (EC Ref No 12065/99, COM(99) 506 final)

SP 460 (EC Ref No 12067/99, COM(99) 508 final)

SP 461 (EC Ref No 12066/99, COM(99) 507 final)

SP 462 (EC Ref No 12068/99, COM(99) 509 final)

SP 463 (EC Ref No 12069/99, COM(99) 510 final)

SP 464 (EC Ref No 12079/99, COM(99) 512 final)

SP 465 (no EC Ref No)

SP 466 (EC Ref No 9614/99, JUR 234 COUR 10)

SP 467 (EC Ref No 11422/99, RECH 102 TRANS 203 ECO 353)

The Convener: For document 468 (EC Ref No 12373/99, COM(99) 456 final), a Scottish cover note has been requested, and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following document:

SP 469 (EC Ref No 11998/99, COM(99) 481 final)

The Convener: For document 470 (EC Ref No 12031/99, COM(99) 486 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 471 (EC Ref No 11442/99, COM(99) 458 final)

SP 472 (EC Ref No 12111/99, COM(99) 488 final)

Dr Ewing: Are we waiting for further documentation on 473?

The Convener: No. The recommendation for document 473 (EC Ref No 12090/99, COM(99) 485 final COD 99/0208) is that no further action be taken.

Dr Ewing: We can get funding from various budgets for languages.

The Convener: Then let us take our list of

documents for which we agree no further action up to 472. What do you think that we should do with 473?

Dr Ewing: Perhaps we should wait for more information or for a copy of the document.

The Convener: We can defer it. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 474 (EC Ref No 12159/99, COM(99) 489 final)

SP 475 (EC Ref No 12012/99, COM(99) 483 final)

SP 476 (EC Ref No 12011/99, COM(99) 467 final)

SP 477 (EC Ref No 11550, PESC 333 COWEB 121)

SP 478 (EC Ref No SEC(99) 1093-94, 1098, 1140-41, 1143, 1266, 1299, 1414)

The Convener: Documents 479 (EC Ref No 12509/99, COPEN 54) and 480 (EC Ref No 11951/99, COPEN 45) are connected with the justice issue that we mentioned earlier. The recommendation for both documents is that no further action be taken at this stage. That is agreed.

The Convener: The next item is consideration of the report to the committee clerk from the clerk to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. I propose that we note that report. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Next is the report to the committee clerk from the clerk to the Rural Affairs Committee. Again, I suggest that we note that report.

Members indicated agreement.

Plant Health (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/129)

The Convener: The next item is consideration of a negative instrument. I suggest that we note this item.

Members indicated agreement.

Convener's Report

The Convener: First, Sylvia Jackson will report on the meeting with a delegation from the Swedish Parliament.

Dr Jackson: Winnie Ewing, Margo MacDonald and Maureen Macmillan were also present. It was a most useful meeting. There was no heavy debate on any particular issue, but it was nice to talk about issues that we share, such as domestic violence, offenders and drug issues, and to get another perspective on those issues.

It was also nice to see the political mix within the delegation. Does Eugene want to say anything? Secretarial support came with the group, but I do not know what ideas were exchanged. Overall, it was a useful and interesting meeting.

The Convener: Thank you.

Dr Ewing: They were going on an intensive tour of the Highlands after the meeting.

The Convener: Very good.

Winnie, the next report is on the meeting with Prince William of Orange.

Dr Ewing: Oh, it was absolutely wonderful. *[Laughter.]* He is Adonis—and the most eligible bachelor in Europe. He was very pleased with me because I speak Dutch, which is my secret weapon. I was a student at The Hague Academy of International Law and I once had a Dutch boyfriend, which was a good incentive. I had a long chat with the prince, who is an amazingly talented fellow in terms of sport: he flies planes and is an Olympic person. His English was absolutely perfect.

The joy of it was that every person in Scotland of Dutch connections was there, plus, I think, people from London. I did not realise that my old friend from the European Parliament, Jack Stewart Clark, would be there with his Dutch wife. He tried to act for the whole Conservative party in Scotland when it had no MEPs. I had not realised that he spoke fluent Dutch as well. It was an interesting meeting, and wonderful hospitality.

The Convener: It was certainly a cultural experience for Prince William of Orange as well. *[Laughter.]* Thank you.

At our next meeting, I suggest that we consider submissions on the Fisheries Council, which will meet on 16 and 17 December. We need to get the industry's thoughts on the agenda of the council's meeting. We could do that in two ways: either we consider written submissions from the industry at our next meeting, which we could then take forward to the Scottish Executive, or we ask a committee member, such as Tavish Scott, to contact industry representatives and bring back a synopsis of their views to the next meeting.

Following the Fisheries Council meeting, I would like to have a report back from the Scottish Executive, to establish the principle that, if it is relevant to this committee, the Executive should

come back to let us know exactly what was discussed. I am open to suggestions.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I agree with your position, convener. That meeting is usually the most important Fisheries Council meeting of the year. The agenda shows that it is a crunch meeting.

The principle that you wish to establish is right, convener. After John Home Robertson came back from his first Fisheries Council meeting, he said that he was open to the suggestion of appearing before the relevant committees. You might want to consider meeting the convener of the Rural Affairs Committee, to ensure that there is a tie-in between the two committees. We need to be on the ball and we should take submissions from the industry. There is nothing as important as this meeting for many of our areas.

The Convener: I could invite members of the Rural Affairs Committee to our next meeting.

As I said, there are two ways of approaching this issue—one is to ask for written submissions and the other is to ask a committee member to co-ordinate responses. What is your view, Tavish?

Tavish Scott: Gulp—I will happily co-ordinate that, if that is the committee's wish.

The Convener: Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Ms MacDonald: Give him forestry if he says no.

The Convener: I will invite members of the Rural Affairs Committee to the next meeting.

David Mundell: It would be a good idea to ask the Executive to report back as well. It might be helpful to ask the Executive to report activity proactively to the committee. As there is no individual minister for European matters, it is quite difficult to pick up what the Executive has been doing.

The Convener: We will try to schedule that item on to the agenda, but it will probably be taken at a meeting early in the new year. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I have one further item to report to members. It appears that the objective 3 plan will not be ready in time for our next meeting. Therefore, we may need to schedule a meeting between then and Christmas to consider the plan. The alternative is for us to get the plan at short notice, an experience that we have been through before and that I do not think is acceptable. Members need plenty of time to consider the plan. We will come back to this issue when I have further information, which I hope will be by the next meeting.

Dr Jackson: Could the committee make a decision one way or the other on what is happening on the East of Scotland European Consortium conference? We need to make other plans if we are not going to attend.

The Convener: Stephen Imrie will speak to people individually about that at the end of, rather than during, the meeting. I thank everyone for attending.

Meeting closed at 15:56.

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