

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 November 2000
(*Afternoon*)

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE **19th Meeting 2000, Session 1**

CONVENER

*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

*Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 14 November 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:31*]

The Convener (Hugh Henry): Welcome to the 19th meeting of the European Committee in 2000. We have apologies from Margo MacDonald, Dennis Canavan, Sylvia Jackson, Ben Wallace, Cathy Jamieson and also from Richard Lochhead, one of our new members, who has double-booked and is at the Rural Affairs Committee meeting.

Members' Interests

The Convener: I welcome Lloyd Quinan, who is a new member of the committee, and invite him to declare his interests.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, convener. I have no interests to declare.

The Convener: We will arrange for Richard Lochhead to declare his interests at the next meeting.

Lloyd, would you like to mention anything that you have done that is relevant to the committee?

Mr Quinan: As members will be aware, I used to be on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, which carried out inquiries into housing stock transfer and into my particular interest—drugs policy. I would like to keep an eye on a number of initiatives on drugs in various parts of Europe. I am also interested in variations in devolution and autonomy throughout the European Union. From non-member states, there is much talk of expanding the union, but there are marked developments in devolution and autonomy in member states. I would like the committee to look into those developments, focusing on the emergence of nations within rather than without the union.

The Convener: You mentioned drugs. We have invited a member of the European Commission to address the committee on the Commission's drugs programme. It is our intention to invite members of other committees to attend, once we know when the Commission member is available. Your mention of drugs policy is a timely reminder to us to pursue that invitation.

Items in Private

The Convener: Item 2 on the agenda is to consider whether the committee should take item 5 in private. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Convener's Report

The Convener: Cathy Jamieson and I had a meeting in Glasgow on 3 November with representatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly, the House of Lords and the House of Commons who are involved in Europe related matters. All the participants found the exercise worth while. Some practical issues about how we cope with the type of work that we do were discussed. The interesting point was made, particularly by representatives from the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies, that the Scottish Parliament is more effective in getting early warning of proposed European policy changes. The discussion was similar to our previous discussions about how to get such early warning and some suggestions were made on how we could use the resources and intelligence networks of the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

More particularly, the officers supporting the three devolved layers of government were asked to pull together a paper that will consider how we might share information, combine areas of political interest and work together at a European as well as at a United Kingdom level. The paper will be a useful starting point for a discussion and the conveners of the European committees will have a follow-up meeting to discuss it. Perhaps we could look also at sponsoring some sort of joint session of the various committees of the legislatures to look at a common European strategy. A minute of the meeting will be circulated in the near future.

The second item on which I will report concerns the council of fisheries ministers meeting on 14 and 15 December, which it would be useful for the committee to discuss. The committees in the House of Commons and the House of Lords have a process whereby ministers are asked to attend committee meetings for discussion both before and after council meetings. The December council meeting on fisheries will be a key date this year for that important sector of the economy. I suggest that we invite the relevant Scottish Executive minister to attend a committee meeting both before the fisheries meeting, so that the committee can make whatever comment it thinks necessary about the significance of that meeting, and, more important, after the meeting, so that the minister can report back to the committee about what went

on. It is part of our remit to encourage the Executive at that level and to find out on behalf of Parliament exactly what is going on. Do members have any thoughts or comments on the matter?

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): That is an excellent suggestion. It has been clear over the past year that there is not an effective mechanism for that sort of report back. The process that the convener has outlined would allow that to happen and I hope that our proposed meeting with the minister will be the first of many. Of course, we are aware of the forthcoming fisheries meeting and the Executive's participation in it, but there are other on-going meetings of which we are not so aware. Perhaps, as a result of the next item that the convener will raise, we can establish a timetable so that such Executive pre and post-meeting briefing becomes part of business as usual.

The Convener: I am sure that our colleagues on the Rural Affairs Committee will be interested. We will certainly make them aware if we get dates.

Mr Quinan: The idea of a pre and post-council briefing is excellent as far as the December meeting is concerned. I am slightly concerned, however, that there is a meeting this week, on 17 November, that will cover matters that are pertinent to the committee such as changes in fleet management arrangements, the impact of the rise in fuel prices and the stability of the fisheries undertakings. In light of changes in quotas there is also an important item on our future fisheries relationship with Morocco. We do not have enough time to ask the relevant minister to come and meet us before Friday, but I would like to know what level of communication the Executive will have with us with regard to the meeting on 17 November. I would also like to know whether, when the minister comes to the committee prior to the meeting of 14 and 15 December, she could come with a report of the November meeting.

The Convener: That would be relevant. In the meantime we could ask for a written report on what has gone on this week. That could be circulated to the committee and may help us in our deliberations at a later date. I will write to the minister asking for the information requested.

The last point in item 3 on the agenda concerns the structural changes within the Executive. The committee will be aware that Jack McConnell has a new set of responsibilities. He will no longer be directly responsible for structural funds but will still have responsibility for European matters and external relations. It will be important to find out from him how the Executive intends to develop that portfolio. If, on behalf of the Parliament and of Scotland, the Executive pushes forward with initiatives such as developing links with the Czech Republic, the committee will need to know the

rationale behind those initiatives, how they will be extended into the wider layers of Scottish society and how those relationships with other countries will be monitored. That will apply to any other links that are developed. The committee has touched upon those issues in the past. It would be useful, therefore, for the minister to come and explain how he sees policy developing.

Following the change in ministerial responsibilities, the Executive added a new factor—external relations—that is probably not part of any other committee portfolio. How will that area of responsibility be monitored? Who will the minister report back to in Parliament? The committee may want to ask the minister that and may also want to raise with the Presiding Officer the question of which committee will be monitoring that part of the Executive's work and whether the remit of any of the committees should be altered to ensure that there is proper scrutiny of the Executive's work.

Mr Quinan: I agree. A good starting point for the committee, however, would be a definition of external affairs. We all have ideas about what we think external affairs means. The Executive must have a clear idea as to what it means, but I have not seen a definition written down anywhere.

The Convener: We can ask the Executive for a definition in advance of the meeting. The only debate then is a tactical one as to whether we ask now who in Parliament will be scrutinising the Executive's work on external relations, or wait until we have heard what the Executive has to say.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The links between education and Europe present real opportunities for us. Some of the links are obvious, including those on the modern language agenda. I hope that we will be given an opportunity to explore that issue with the minister when he comes before the committee. As 2001 is the European year of languages, I welcome the opportunity that that gives for the committee and the minister to work together to promote the development of modern languages in Scotland.

The Convener: We will ask the minister to attend a committee meeting to explain his portfolio. Our letter will also request that a definition of his external affairs remit be given to us in advance of that meeting. Once we have an understanding of that definition, I can make further inquiries, on behalf of the committee, within the Parliamentary structure, as to how scrutiny of the minister's external affairs remit will be undertaken.

14:45

David Mundell: I agree with that proposal. It would also be useful—not necessarily on the same occasion—to invite Mr Angus MacKay to

appear before the committee to tell us how he sees his role in relation to structural funding.

When our report on structural funds was published earlier this month, I noted with interest that it was Mr MacKay who issued the Executive comments. In the past year, the committee has had to look at a number of issues relating to the time scale and operation of structural fund allocation. That has formed a large part of our workload, probably a larger part than we might have wanted. It is important for the committee to have an understanding of Mr MacKay's perspective and to establish a link between the committee and his department, in addition to our relationship with Mr McConnell.

The Convener: One decision we made when we looked at structural funds was that we would regularly monitor and review the plans. That will allow us to write to the Executive asking for a response early in the new year as to how it will report to this committee. We can then agree with the minister on a timetable for carrying out that work.

We might want to raise other issues with the minister by that time: for example the letter I wrote to Jack McConnell on objective 3 funding that was circulated to committee members although Lloyd Quinan—as a new member of the committee—may not have a copy. That is an issue of concern to many voluntary organisations and if it is still a problem, we will need to ask Angus MacKay to appear before the committee so that we can look at that. That was a point well made, David.

Mr Quinan: On that point, under item 3 of the convener's report, I note that we are seeking "a mutually acceptable date" to meet Jack McConnell. I am led to believe that the minister is going to Europe at the beginning of next month. I am not sure what other members think, but I would like to know—prior to Jack McConnell going to Europe—what the Executive's strategy for Europe is. That would be similar to our decision under item 2 of the convener's report, to invite ministers to attend this committee pre and post European Council meetings.

The Convener: The clerk and I are looking at a date—possibly at the end of this month—for the minister to appear before the committee in advance of any meetings he has in Europe. That date is not yet confirmed. Stephen Imrie, our clerk, is waiting to hear from the minister's private office. I will advise members of a date as soon as possible.

Scrutiny

The Convener: Item 4 allows the committee to return to the important element of our work that is the scrutiny of documents. A list of recommendations has been circulated to members, along with the relevant documents. I will move through this item section by section.

Members will see from page 1 of the priority scrutiny recommendation note that no documents were circulated for this item. For the routine scrutiny item, we are asked to refer to two documents as shown on page 2: the first is SP 1396 (EC Ref No 11274/00 COM(2000) 538 final CNS 2000/0226) Council Regulation on information provision and promotion for agricultural products on the internal market.

I recommend that we ask the Executive for a statement on its position on the regulation and that we send the document to the Rural Affairs Committee to ask for its perspective. The two angles are self-evident. First, we need clarification of the Government's position on the proposal. Secondly, it would be useful to see whether the relevant parliamentary committee has a distinct view and for it to advise us whether the proposal contains anything that we should deal with.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The second document is SP 1437 (EC Ref No 11191/00 COM(2000) 549 final), commission recommendation for a council recommendation on the implementation of member states' employment policies. I suggest that the committee welcome the document, which has significant implications, and ask the Executive how it will implement the recommendations. I also suggest that we ask the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee to comment on how they will monitor the Executive's implementation of the proposals. We should ask those committees to refer back to us anything specific to our remit.

Irene Oldfather: That is a useful suggestion. I note that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning have been looking at local economic forums and their role in the local economic development agenda, particularly in relation to employment. It would be worth bringing the document to that committee's attention and asking it for comments in the light of that work.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The recommended action for the following documents is that we defer them until we have further information:

SP 1406 (EC Ref No 10802/00 COM(2000) 347 final COD2000/0158, COD2000/0159)

SP 1338 (EC Ref No 10802/00 COM(2000) 347 final COD 2000/0158, COD 2000/0159)

SP 1006 (EC Ref No 7952/00 DROIPEN 14)

SP 1092 (EC Ref No 7426/00 COM(2000) 272 final)

SP 1169 (EC Ref No 8264/00 COM(2000) 338 final)

SP 1434 (EC Ref No 11305/00 DROIPEN 39)

SP 1489 (EC Ref No SN 3383/00)

SP 1490 (EC Ref No 11666/00 SEC(2000) 1564)

SP 1501 (EC Ref No 9737/2/00 REV 2)

SP 1503 (EC Ref No 11344/2/00 REV 2)

SP 1504 (EC Ref No 11808/00)

SP 1021 (EC Ref No 8075/00 COM(2000) 238 final)

SP 1402 (EC Ref No 11265/00 COM(2000) 503 final)

SP 1435 (EC Ref No 10776/00 COM(2000) 7 final)

SP 1451 (EC Ref No 11547/00 COM(2000) 592 final)

SP 1454 (EC Ref No 11840/00 COM(2000) 547 final)

SP 1491 (EC Ref No 11667/00 COM(2000) 567 final)

SP 1493 (EC Ref No 11788/00 SEC(2000) 1531)

SP 1509 (EC Ref No 12189/00 SOC 333)

SP 1514 (EC Ref No 12074/00 COM(2000) 619 final)

SP 1492 (EC Ref No 9737/3/00 REV 3)

Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The recommendation for the following documents is that we take no further action but copy them to specific committees for their interest:

SP 1373 (EC Ref No 10166/00 COM(2000) 5 final)

SP 1519 (EC Ref No 11949/00 COM(2000) 593 final)

SP 1430 (EC Ref No 11517/00 COM(2000) 489 final)

SP 1461 (EC Ref No 11757/00 COM(2000) 576 final)

SP 1499 (EC Ref No 11909/00 COM(2000) 594 final)

Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The recommendation is that we take no further action on the following documents:

SP 1403 (EC Ref No 10371/00 COM(2000) 453 final)

SP 1407 (EC Ref No 11262/00 COM(2000) 509 final)

SP 1408 (EC Ref No 11261/00 COM(2000) 508 final)

SP 1409 (EC Ref No 11260/00 COM(2000) 506 final)

SP 1410 (EC Ref No 11259/00 COM(2000) 505 final)

SP 1413 (EC Ref No 11159/00 COM(2000) 478 final)

SP 1414 (EC Ref No 11117/00 COM(2000) 407 final COD 2000/0187)

SP 1417 (EC Ref No 10608/00 COM(2000) 514 final)

SP 1418 (EC Ref No 10607/00 COM(2000) 501 final)

SP 1419 (EC Ref No 10881/00 COM(2000) 504 final)

SP 1420 (EC Ref No 10889/00 COM(2000) 530 final)

SP 1421 (EC Ref No 10922/00 COM(2000) 544 final)

SP 1422 (EC Ref No 10951/00 COM(2000) 534 final)

SP 1423 (EC Ref No 10919/00 COM(2000) 543 final)

SP 1441 (EC Ref No 11381/00 COM(2000) 497 final)

SP 1446 (EC Ref No 11594/00 COM(2000) 462 final)

SP 1455 (EC Ref No 11804/00 COM(2000) 584 final)

SP 1464 (EC Ref No 11624/00 COM(2000) 537 final CNS 2000/0223)

SP 1467 (EC Ref No 11511/00 COM(2000) 601 final)

SP 1476 (EC Ref No 10314/00)

SP 1477 (EC Ref No 11251/00)

SP 1478 (EC Ref No 10720/00 SEC(2000) 1884)

SP 1488 (EC Ref No 7027/00 SIS 32)

SP 1496 (EC Ref No 11684/00 COM(2000) 589 final)

SP 1497 (EC Ref No 11847/00)

SP 1498 (EC Ref No 11848/00 COM(2000) 582 final 2000/0243(CNS))

SP 1511 (EC Ref No SEC(2000) 1377 final)

SP 1512 (EC Ref No 10722/00)

SP 1516 (EC Ref No 12017/00 COM(2000) 588 final)

SP 1517 (EC Ref No 12003/00 COM(2000) 607 final)

SP 1520 (EC Ref No 11787/00 ADD 1 COM(2000) 1113 final)

SP 1522 (EC Ref No 11765/00 COM(2000) 577 final)

SP 1401 (EC Ref No 11266/00 COM(2000) 487 final COD 2000/0211)

SP 1404 (EC Ref No 10586/00 COM(2000) 445 final)

SP 1405 (EC Ref No 10590/00 COM(2000) 439 final)

SP 1411 (EC Ref No 11253/00 COM(2000) 524 final)

SP 1412 (EC Ref No 11244/00 COM(2000) 522 final)

SP 1415 (EC Ref No 11072/00 SEC(2000) 1295)

SP 1416 (EC Ref No 10936/00 COM(2000) 527 final COD 97/0345)

SP 1424 (EC Ref No 11581/00 SIS 82 COMIX 678)

SP 1425 (EC Ref No 11596/00 COM(2000) 529 final)

SP 1426 (EC Ref No 11578/00 COM(2000) 533 final)

SP 1427 (EC Ref No 11577/00 COM(2000) 575 final)

SP 1428 (EC Ref No 11576/00 COM(2000) 572 final)

SP 1429 (EC Ref No 11575/00 COM(2000) 571 final)

SP 1431 (EC Ref No 11492/00 COM(2000) 566 final (COD 2000/0233))

SP 1432 (EC Ref No 11327/00 COM(2000) 518 final)

SP 1433 (EC Ref No 10815/00 SEC(2000) 1359 final)

SP 1436 (EC Ref No 11189/00 COM(2000) 548 final)
 SP 1438 (EC Ref No 11365/00 COM(2000) 557 final 2000/0229 (ACC))
 SP 1439 (EC Ref No 11367/00 COM(2000) 569 final)
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 SP 1449 (EC Ref No 10346/00 COM(2000) 276 final 2)
 SP 1452 (EC Ref No 11901/00 COM(2000) 585 final)
 SP 1453 (EC Ref No 11859/00 COM(2000) 600 final)
 SP 1456 (EC Ref No 11795/00 COM(2000) 570 final)
 SP 1457 (EC Ref No 11794/00 COM(2000) 564 final)
 SP 1458 (EC Ref No 11793/00 COM(2000) 563 final)
 SP 1459 (EC Ref No 11792/00 COM(2000) 568 final COD 2000/0235)
 SP 1460 (EC Ref No 11791/00 COM(2000) 596 final)
 SP 1462 (EC Ref No 11686/00 COM(2000) 511 final COD 2000/0213)
 SP 1463 (EC Ref No 11668/00)
 SP 1465 (EC Ref No 11623/00 COM(2000) 583 final)
 SP 1466 (EC Ref No 11595/00 COM(2000) 542 final)
 SP 1468 (EC Ref No 11353/00 COM(2000) 532 final)
 SP 1469 (EC Ref No 11330/00 COM(2000) 521 final)
 SP 1470 (EC Ref No 11329/00 COM(2000) 520 final)
 SP 1471 (EC Ref No 11328/00 COM(2000) 519 final)
 SP 1472 (EC Ref No 11190/00 ADD1 COM(2000) 551 final (Volume I))
 SP 1473 (EC Ref No 11190/00 COM(2000) 551 final (Volume I))
 SP 1474 (EC Ref No 10609/00 COM(2000) 581 final)
 SP 1475 (EC Ref No 10877/00 COM(2000) 491 final)
 SP 1479 (EC Ref No 10299/00 ADD 1 Volume 10)
 SP 1480 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 8)
 SP 1481 (EC Ref No Budget volume 6)
 SP 1482 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 7)
 SP 1483 (EC Ref No Budget volume 1)
 SP 1484 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 5)
 SP 1485 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 9)
 SP 1486 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 3)
 SP 1487 (EC Ref No Budget Volume 4)
 SP 1494 (EC Ref No 11297/00 COM(2000) 432 final)
 SP 1495 (EC Ref No COM(2000) 526 final)
 SP 1500 (EC Ref No 11926/00 COM(2000) 605 final)
 SP 1505 (EC Ref No 11997/00 COM(2000) 603 final)

SP 1506 (EC Ref No 10401/00 COM(2000) 498 final)
 SP 1507 (EC Ref No 10884/00 COM(2000) 531 final)
 SP 1508 (EC Ref No 10940/00 COM(2000) 556 final)
 SP 1510 (EC Ref No 9223/00)
 SP 1513 (EC Ref No 12075/00 COM(2000) 629 final)
 SP 1515 (EC Ref No 12022/00 COM(2000) 580 final)
 SP 1518 (EC Ref No 11983/00 COM(2000) 590 final ACC 2000/0242)
 SP 1521 (EC Ref No 11787/00 COM(2000) 591 final)
 SP 1447 (EC Ref No 11648/00 PESC 405 COAFR 60 COARM 10)
 SP 1450 (EC Ref No 11356/00 ENFOPOL 61)
 SP 1225 (EC Ref No 9440/00 COM(2000) 378 final)
 SP 1276 (EC Ref No 10346/00 COM(2000) 276 final COD 2000/0117)
 SP 1297 (EC Ref No 10544/00 COM(2000) 319 final COD 2000/0139)
 SP 1381 (EC Ref No 11113/00 COM(2000) 441 final)
 SP 1502 (EC Ref No 11186/00)

Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We now move into private session.

David Mundell: Before we do that, I would like the committee to put on the public record its thanks for the work that our clerks, Stephen Imrie and David Simpson, and our adviser, John Bachtler, did for our report into European structural funds. When we finalised the report, we agreed to put our thanks on record. As we were in private session at that point, we should put it on the public record now. They certainly have my thanks and I am sure that they have that of the other committee members, past and present.

The Convener: We did thank everyone concerned, but, as David Mundell says, that part of our meeting was in private. John Bachtler did a huge amount of work, but we should not underestimate the work that our own parliamentary staff carried out. It is a good, well-structured report, as was the report on football transfer fees. We are very appreciative of the huge amount of work done on our behalf.

We now move into private session.

14:54

Meeting continued in private until 15:15.

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