

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 18 December 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 18 December 2001

	Col.
ITEMS IN PRIVATE	1307
CONVENER'S REPORT	1308

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE **16th Meeting 2001, Session 1**

CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

*Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

*Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Simpson

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 18 December 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:08*]

Items in Private

The Convener (Irene Oldfather): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome to the 16th and final meeting this year of the European Committee. I have not received any apologies, so we will move straight to item 1 on our agenda, which is for the committee to agree to take in private items 3 and 4, which involve consideration of private legal advice from the clerks and of a draft committee report. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Convener's Report

The Convener: Next, I will update members on a few developments. Members have received copies of the Executive's response to our report on the proposed directive on consulting workers. We thank the Executive for the detail of its reply, but note that it has rejected a number of our main recommendations. The committee will want to restate that it continues to endorse those recommendations.

It would be helpful for me to update members on the progress that has been made on the directive. From sources in the European Parliament, I understand that the Conciliation Committee has reached an agreement between the European Parliament and the European Council, which will enable the directive to become law in due course. The compromise deal that has been agreed relates mainly to transitional periods, sanctions and definitions. The main change that has been agreed is that the directive should come into force in three years, with an additional year for the United Kingdom and Ireland, rather than in two years, as was suggested in the common position. Smaller companies will have an additional three years to put the directive into effect. The deal represents a halfway house between the position of the Council and that of the European Parliament.

Do members agree to the recommendation that is in the paper before them?

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I am slightly nervous about agreeing a recommendation that states that

"The Committee welcomes the response of the Executive"

but goes on to say that the Executive has rejected most of the committee's recommendations. I am not sure that "welcomes" is the right verb for us to use.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the Executive's response because I supported the United Kingdom Government's line on the issue.

Mr Home Robertson: Perhaps we should say that we note the Executive's response.

The Convener: I understand the point that John Home Robertson is making. However, we welcome the detail that the Executive has provided to the committee. Perhaps we can say that we welcome the detail and note the Executive's response. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Last weekend the Laeken summit took place. Would members like the clerks to prepare a position statement on the summit, to be brought to the committee's next meeting? That would provide us with the background against which to take forward our work over the next year, looking forward to the 2004 intergovernmental conference. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Ben Wallace: The UK Government's nomination for the working committee on what was agreed at Laeken is David Miliband MP. I think that he is the only UK member of the committee, which will be headed by former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. We could ask David Miliband to appear before us so that we can put our views to him as part of the process. That would be useful.

The Convener: Stephen Imrie has informed me that there will probably be three UK representatives on the working committee. In our report on governance, we made the point that we would like to see some regional representation.

Ben Wallace: This is just a working group.

The Convener: As opposed to the constitutional convention.

Ben Wallace: Yes. The working group will discuss how the convention should proceed and what it should be. Given David Miliband's proximity to the Prime Minister, inviting him to appear before the committee would be an easy way to have Scotland's voice heard close to the centre of power.

Mr Home Robertson: That is a constructive suggestion.

The Convener: How do other members feel about that? I think that Ben Wallace has made a good suggestion. Do members agree that we should invite David Miliband to discuss with us the contents of our report on governance?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We are ready to move to item 3 on our agenda, which will be taken in private. I thank members of the public for attending.

14:13

Meeting continued in private until 16:19.

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