

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 January 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2002, 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

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 29 January 2002

(Afternoon)

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

EC/EU Legislation (Implementation and Scrutiny)

The Convener (Irene Oldfather): Colleagues, I open the meeting. I understand that last time we started two minutes early—I hope that today we are starting bang on 2 o'clock. I have received apologies from Nora Radcliffe and Helen Eadie.

The first item on the agenda is discussion of a paper that sets out the details of our agreement last week on the committee's two main roles in relation to the implementation of European Community legislation in Scotland. The paper is pretty self-explanatory and takes account of the discussions that we have had. Do members have any further comments?

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I have a query about the role of the committee, based on my previous experience as a member of the Health and Community Care Committee. When legislation born out of an European directive arrived at the Health and Community Care Committee, it did not come with the relevant directive. I do not know what the situation is with the Subordinate Legislation Committee, one of whose tasks is to scrutinise such legislation. Subject committees were not able to compare whether Scottish statutory instruments were in accordance with directives. Their response to statutory instruments was based purely on the instruments themselves.

Should it be our role to determine whether legislation is compatible with the directives on which it is based? It is important that we consider not only the time scales for implementation, but how directives are implemented. I know that there are thousands of directives, and I am not asking that we scrutinise every one of them, but when dealing with legislation that has an impact on many people's lives, we should compare statutory instruments with the relevant directives.

I will provide the committee with an example, although I am not asking the committee to look into it. The Government's consultation on nitrate zones comes in response to a directive that we were very slow to implement, which led to our

being fined by the European Court of Justice. However, a comparison between the directive and the Government's consultation paper reveals that there is a difference between how the European Union expects us to assess our nitrate zones and how the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has carried out that assessment. It is important that we get to question the officials from quangos about why they decided to ratchet up directives that have an impact on people. Almost half of the north-east will be a nitrate zone, but the testing required by Europe is far too detailed to produce such a map of assessment. According to the EU directive, there has to be a test site every mile and a half.

The Convener: What we say in the paper does not necessarily preclude our examining how directives are implemented. I would like us to liaise rather better with the subject committees. If they are in agreement and we are not duplicating work that another committee in the Parliament intends to do, I see no reason why we should not investigate why something has occurred in a certain way, instead of just considering cases of late implementation. I have no problem with that and it seemed to be what was suggested in last week's discussion. Are other committee members happy with that?

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Ben Wallace has made a reasonable point. It is within the spirit of the paper for us to examine where directives are applied differently in Scotland or whether they could or should be applied differently in Scotland. We need to set up a mechanism with the subject committees that would allow the process to be triggered.

Ben Wallace: Can the clerks check whether a facility for committees to compare subordinate legislation with the relevant EU directives already exists? Some committees may be doing that, whereas others may not. We may need only to tweak the mechanism to ensure that subject committees receive copies of directives. If they have a problem, they can refer the matter to us.

The Convener: Paragraph 8 of the paper suggests that we proceed "on a case-by-case basis". In principle it would be fine for us to do what Ben Wallace suggests and to link up with the subject committees. In the meantime, the clerks can investigate the extent to which such scrutiny already takes place and where the gaps in the system are. The paper allows for us to examine how directives are implemented. Ben Wallace is right to say that, if we are to learn lessons from where things are going wrong, we should have an analysis of situations, rather than just figures.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Paragraph 5 of the paper refers to the Subordinate Legislation Committee's role in the scrutiny of documents,

including Scottish statutory instruments that implement European legislation. The paper also refers to reports by the Subordinate Legislation Committee to the Parliament. In cases of non-implementation or late implementation of European legislation, does the committee report to the Parliament or just to the European Committee?

The Convener: Members will recall a discussion that we had with the Executive about six months ago, as a result of which we now receive a list with information on the implementation of directives. Once the new scrutiny process is formalised, it will be our role to work through that list and to identify any areas that we want to develop. Stephen Imrie can update us on that.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): One member of the committee, Colin Campbell, is also a member of the Subordinate Legislation Committee. The Subordinate Legislation Committee reports to the whole Parliament and publishes a committee report that is available to all members, in the same way as our reports are. On at least one occasion in the past, the Subordinate Legislation Committee has drawn the European Committee's attention to a problem with implementation.

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): It is all about legal implementation and the speed thereof. The content and principle of the legislation are not the business of the Subordinate Legislation Committee. We note an instrument and would pass it on to the European Committee if there were something conspicuously wrong with it legally.

The Convener: Does that answer Dennis Canavan's question?

Dennis Canavan: Partly, but I do not recall any instance of the Subordinate Legislation Committee reporting to us about the non-implementation or late implementation of European legislation. I thought that our committee would have a role not only in noting non-implementation or late implementation, but in recommending to the Executive that it should pull its socks up and get on with it.

The Convener: I have been advised that the Subordinate Legislation Committee has written to the convener of this committee before. We are saying that there has been a vacuum and that now we want to ensure that we take up anything that is relevant to our remit. Anything that is passed to us now will fall within our new remit.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): For clarification, the convener, Hugh Henry, was informed and he decided whether we should discuss the matter during the sift.

The Convener: The clerk is trying to recall how the process operated. Perhaps we could look into what happened when issues were raised with us before. We assure members that procedures are now in place to deal with information that comes from the Subordinate Legislation Committee or any other committee that feels that we have a role because of our new remit in relation to the scrutiny of implementation.

I will ask the clerks to make the necessary arrangements to begin our work in this area. We have agreed the principles. It is important that we put in place procedures to review the type and frequency of information that we receive from the Executive and the other committees. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Committee Report (Euro)

The Convener: The next item is discussion of the Executive's formal response to our report on the euro in Scotland. We have received a comprehensive and timeous reply. I understand that the reply is being made quite widely available, which will give the report the attention that it deserves.

The Executive commented on learning from the experience of other member states. As a member of the Committee of the Regions, I felt that the forum would present opportunities to find out what preparations are being made in other regions of Europe. We could find out about the difficulties that they are facing, the lessons that they are learning and the good practice that is being shared. I am sure that the Committee of the Regions will produce a report. I would be happy to feed that information into this committee's deliberations, because the matter is of interest to us.

Mr Quinan: Is grant aid from the European Union now calculated in euros?

The Convener: My understanding is that, for a considerable number of years, calculations were made in ecus and that they are now made in euros.

Mr Quinan: I appreciate that. However, given that we now have the single currency and the currency zone, as opposed to the exchange rate mechanism and the ecu, is there compensation for fluctuation in the exchange rate between the pound and the euro? Is it the same system as was used vis-à-vis the ecu?

The Convener: I understand that it is. Perhaps Ben Wallace has some information.

Ben Wallace: There is a system of compensation for the common agricultural policy. Obviously, our contribution to Europe will now be in euros, so a strong pound will buy us more euros for our contribution.

Mr Quinan: It would be worth while knowing what the regulations are and being aware of the potential for gain or loss depending on the euro exchange rate. The impression was given that the situation is different for different schemes. If the CAP uses euros, do structural funds or other projects do the same?

14:15

Ben Wallace: It is scheme-based.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): Historically, the green pound corrected CAP support, but I could not tell you whether the same applies to structural funds.

Ben Wallace: I do not think that it applies to structural funds, but it would be interesting to know, because the structural funds budget was set from the end of 1999 to 2006. How we draw funds down from the Treasury and how the Treasury draws them down from Brussels is what will make the difference.

Mr Quinan: Would it be possible for us to get clarification on that?

The Convener: Yes, I am happy to ask the clerks to look into that.

Mr Home Robertson: Presumably it is open to people to receive payments directly in euros, if they so choose, except the euro is not legal tender here, is it?

Mr Quinan: It would be useful to know whether there is an additional cost to the administrators of the funds, be it Scottish Enterprise or whatever, which may or may not be compensated for in the context of the exchange rate.

The Convener: Historically, all calculations were made in ecus. I imagine that that has continued, but we should ask the clerk to look into the matter and report back to the committee.

Dennis Canavan: I want to register my strong dissatisfaction with paragraph 17 of the Executive's response, which states:

"the Scottish Executive does not consider that there are needs for ... a separate programme of general familiarisation ... a targeted campaign for educating young people ... or ... the creation of a working party ... for vulnerable groups".

The Executive gives no reason for that dismissal of what I thought were good recommendations. Is the Executive using paragraph 16 as a justification? As far as I know, paragraph 16 is factually accurate and no doubt the measures that it describes will help the business community and people who go to the euro zone on holiday, but there are people in our schools and in the population in general—vulnerable groups, such as people with learning disabilities—who do not have the opportunity to travel abroad. We should ask the Executive to reconsider its response to our recommendations in the light of experience.

The Convener: I know what you are saying. However, the report explains that member states that are using the euro and member states that are outside the euro zone have differing needs. That explains why the Executive does not feel that a targeted campaign for young people is necessary.

I know from my experience of the Committee of the Regions that there were many familiarisation campaigns in member states long before January. I suppose the point is that we have not committed to entering the euro yet, which is the Executive's

point in the preliminary arguments to paragraph 17. However, when we drafted the report, the committee felt that familiarisation for vulnerable groups—and I recall asking for a paragraph on that issue to be inserted in the report—would be a worthwhile exercise. I would not be averse to writing back to the minister on that point.

Sarah Boyack: I have a slightly different point, which is about how we use the response. I was struck by the extent to which different industries have slightly differing views on their relationship with the euro. People in the tourism industry have specific views, so I wonder whether we could ask the Executive to come back to us after the first tourist season following the introduction of the euro. Although the Executive has said that it is doing as much as is necessary and thinks that all the plans are in place, I would like a review of how the mechanisms have worked, with a specific focus on training. Some of the tourism organisations that lobbied us a couple of weeks ago have concerns about the extent to which smaller tourism companies can access and use the information that has been prepared. If we asked the Executive for a review, it would take the work a bit further.

That brings me back to Dennis Canavan's points. There is the question of preparing for the euro—if we are to have it—but we must also deal with the reality of its existence. A few months down the line, we will be able to see how things have gone and whether there is a need for the Executive either to take a slightly different tack or to refresh the campaigning work that is already being done.

Mr Home Robertson: I strongly support what Sarah Boyack has said. We should certainly take stock during or at the end of the coming tourist season. I am grateful to Dennis Canavan for flagging up the fact that paragraph 17 does not really square with paragraph 16. Paragraph 16 lists the actions that have been taken to inform business, industry and commerce, but the recommendations that he referred to concern much wider education. It is important to establish with the education department whether the curriculum in schools and colleges has been brought up to date. There is no point in continuing to teach people about deutschmarks, francs and lire. Kids should be aware as early as possible that something new is happening and that we may be involved in it in due course.

The Convener: That is a good point. I would like to make a couple of points about monitoring and reporting, but Ben Wallace has some comments to make first.

Ben Wallace: I understand the emphasis on making people familiar with the euro, which is predominantly the concern of the business and

tourism sector, but I agree with John Home Robertson's point about education. I also agree with what Dennis Canavan said. If the UK were committed to joining the euro—although I do not think that that will happen—the points made in paragraph 17 should not be neglected.

It is interesting to note that paragraph 16 ties in with enlargement. The fact that the Treasury has committed only £9.9 million to business education and familiarisation with the euro is pathetic, because £9.9 million will not get us very far. It might cover writing one letter to every business in the UK. If the Treasury thinks that that will encourage people to be familiar with and take advantage of the euro—whether it is a strong currency or a weak one—that is simply not good enough. I find the figure extraordinary, unless there has been a typing error.

Mr Home Robertson: Is that an expenditure commitment from the Conservative party? [*Laughter.*]

Ben Wallace: I think that it is, because you would get that money back. If your business was familiar with a weak currency, you could take advantage of it and get your money back in profits.

The Convener: So you are a creative accountant.

Colin Campbell: Am I wrong in thinking that we were being put back in our box a little bit? Reading the response, I felt that the Executive was telling us all the time, "We've done this and this and this." As has been said, the failure to mention teaching kids about the euro is a quite conspicuous omission. Earlier, I wanted—but did not have the opportunity—to comment on the view that it is inappropriate for the UK Government or the Scottish Executive to comment publicly on the success of preparations for the euro. We can understand the diplomatic reasons why they would not want to do that, but is there any reason why they should not be able to publish a summary of the conclusions of other people who have already introduced the euro—for our delectation and delight or to help anyone else who wants an overview of the euro situation?

The Government may have been worried that we would appear to criticise our European colleagues if we were to pass judgment on the success or otherwise of their introduction of the euro, but that is not to say that it could not be done more diplomatically. The information could still be made available.

The Convener: That is not what the committee intended when it was writing the report. The intention was to learn from the experiences of other member states that are ahead of us on the time scale. That is a reasonable point.

Colin Campbell: Did the Treasury misinterpret what we were trying to say?

The Convener: We intended to say that we would like to learn from the experiences of other regions. I believe that there is an opportunity to do that because there is no doubt that the Committee of the Regions will produce an opinion within the first year of the introduction of the euro on mainland Europe. I would be happy to feed back to the Committee of the Regions.

A number of points have been raised in relation to monitoring and review. It is important that we follow through on that and that we identify the points about monitoring in relation to education and tourism. Sarah Boyack made a point about the first tourist season after introduction of the euro—some kind of analysis of how that goes would be useful.

Paragraph 22 of the Executive's response mentions a newly established working group to consider local authority planning. Again, that is a matter on which we can ask to be updated.

Paragraph 23 makes reference to the European monetary union co-ordination group. There is a list of the key players in the Scottish business sector that are contributing to that group, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Federation of Small Businesses. I note that there does not seem to be any input from the Parliament. I wonder whether it would be appropriate for the Parliament to input to the process. Do members feel that we should raise that point with the minister? Parliament's involvement does not have to be in relation to the European Committee—it might be in relation to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee or at some other level within the Parliament. Local government, business and the Treasury all seem to be represented on that group. Do members feel that we should raise that point?

Mr Quinan: That would be appropriate. We need to push for parliamentary representation, rather than there just being Executive representation, on any such bodies. This is the first Parliament since devolution and we are in the early stages of building relationships and structures. It is essential that we at least bid for such involvement.

I would like to make some points in relation to paragraph 17. I agree with almost everything that has been said until now, but I have a slight difference of opinion with Ben Wallace. I would like clarification of why the Executive came to the conclusion that it expresses in paragraph 17. We live in a free employment market and it is incumbent upon us to train or to educate our kids and the broader work force to take advantage of free movement of labour in the euro zone, and to

fully appreciate and understand the use of the euro. That seems straightforward and obvious.

Correct me if I am wrong, but there was a budget from the European Union to cover education costs in the countries that agreed to join the euro.

The Convener: That is right.

Mr Quinan: Although at this stage, the UK is not committed to joining the euro, can it access that education fund to pay for the change in our curriculum, for example? The change must have large cost implications throughout the country as well as through all educational establishments, which will have to provide new materials and, potentially, to train teachers. That has implications for COSLA, the Scottish Executive education department and the Parliament.

It is important that we find out whether that education programme is going on. Paragraph 17 gives the impression that it is not. If it is not going ahead, we need to find out whether that is because of its cost and whether we can access EU funds to cover that education programme, without making a commitment to joining the euro.

The Convener: The European Commission set up a programme called the PRINCE programme, which aimed to provide funding for such matters. If my recollection is correct, a smaller proportion of the budget was set aside for member states that wanted to undertake information campaigns generally and exchange information with other regions. I am not sure whether that money has been accessed.

Mr Quinan: Can we ask whether it has?

The Convener: We can certainly look into that and find out whether the programme is still in operation. Stephen Imrie tells me that the UK has received some PRINCE programme money, possibly for the City of Edinburgh Council. We can produce further information on that for the committee, and we might want to disseminate the information further if the fund is accessible by local authorities and groups in the voluntary sector—as I suspect it might be—rather than just by member states.

Mr Quinan: It is part of our scrutiny role to consider potential costs that are not related directly to directives or law made by the Parliament or the European Union. If joining the euro has cost implications for us, surely it is important that we research the issue and seek potential funding from the EU to cover the additional costs, particularly in education.

14:30

The Convener: As I recall, the PRINCE programme was not available for curriculum

development but for information campaigns—especially for elderly and vulnerable citizens—such as leaflets for libraries and so on.

Mr Home Robertson: We should not labour the point. The introduction of the euro will simplify the experience of most citizens in Europe, which is the whole idea behind it. I presume that it will not make life any more difficult for teachers. The point about material in schools is the one that needs to be addressed.

Mr Quinan: My primary concern is the potential costs. We and the education authorities should be aware that, irrespective of whether we join or do not join the euro, it is incumbent on us to educate our people to allow them to maximise their opportunities in the free employment market—although we do not teach them languages.

Mr Home Robertson: Not very well.

The Convener: We are getting much better at it.

We have agreed to write to the Executive, asking whether we can have the situation monitored and a report submitted to us in respect of issues such as the education programme, the euro's effect on tourism after the first season during which the euro is used and some information about the PRINCE programme. We will report back on all that at the next committee meeting. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Cod and Hake Recovery Plans

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is the cod and hake recovery plans.

Mr Home Robertson: God, not fish again.

The Convener: This is obviously your domain, John.

We are putting into the public domain some useful correspondence that we have received from Executive officials in relation to the cod and hake recovery plans. I thank the officials for keeping the committee up to date and for complying with our request that they supply that information to us. That is not always the case with certain departments, but in this case it has been so and we should give credit where it is due, which is to branch 1 of the sea fisheries division.

Mr Home Robertson: Hear, hear. They are good people.

The Convener: I suggest that we note the contents of the report that we have received. Do members have any points that they want to make in relation to the report?

Mr Home Robertson: It is not really a report; it is a helpful update.

Ben Wallace: We should reflect on the time scales. The attempts to reduce the cod catch—which led to the political rows that we had last year—are on-going and we have yet to see any real results. I do not expect any to appear overnight, but the effectiveness of the measures that the Scottish Executive implemented must come under scrutiny. Many people in the north-east and many members of the Parliament disagreed with those measures. Spain—which also has a significant interest in fishing—now has presidency of the European Union and will take the lead in making any changes to the measures that can be taken. I would like at least some clues as to how effective the measures have been, even in the short term.

The Convener: I was going to suggest that we pass on the paper and annexes to the Rural Development Committee and that we allow it the opportunity to comment, if it wants to do that.

Mr Quinan: Will you tell us what is in the note that the clerk has just passed to you? It might make what I was about to say redundant.

The Convener: Stephen Imrie has reminded me that Struan Stevenson is a member of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee. We can contact and discuss the matter with him.

Mr Home Robertson: Did you have to remind us of that?

Mr Quinan: I fully endorse what the convener said. The Rural Development Committee knows more about the matter than most folk. However, another issue relates to the European Committee in particular, and that is the Spanish presidency's approach to the issue. We should keep a watchful eye out. The largest market and fleet are under the Spanish flag. Spain is less than happy with the cod recovery plan and there are serious internal pressures being put on the Spanish presidency from Galicia, the Basque country and Asturias to push back boundaries in respect of recovery plans. That was the chat in the newspapers when I was in Spain a week ago last Saturday. Keeping an eye on how the Spanish presidency makes use of its time in the seat, as it were, would be worth while—the issue is vital in maintaining domestic quiet in Spanish politics.

The Convener: Spain's views have been known for a considerable time.

Mr Quinan: During our inquiry, we discovered that there is a Spanish view and that there are internal Spanish views, but we also discovered what actually goes on.

Mr Home Robertson: We should remember that the excellent principle of relative stability means that the Spanish interest in the North sea is zero—long may that continue.

Mr Quinan: Absolutely.

The Convener: It is useful to note from the report that the Executive has confirmed that it looks as though the Commission will go ahead with proposals for further cuts, but the UK will oppose those. The view of the Executive and the UK Government is that it is not feasible to design and implement such schemes in such a short time. It is important that that is on record. Perhaps the committee will agree to copy the briefing paper and the annexes to the Rural Development Committee and offer to be involved further, if necessary. We will give to the Rural Development Committee information that it might wish to deal with by itself. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Convener's Report

The Convener: There are a number of matters to discuss under agenda item 4. The clerks have provided us with a copy of Scotland Europa's briefing paper on the Laeken European Council, which we requested. I have also been asked to draw to members' attention the fact that the Scottish Parliament information centre intends to produce a briefing paper for our governance report. We should note those developments and that the date for the debate in the chamber is 27 February, as I have said.

The next matter is the proposed committee visit to European institutions. We discussed this at our previous meeting and investigated the possibility of going to Strasbourg. We have taken soundings from Dermot Scott and Liz Holt of the European Parliament office in Scotland and the European Commission Representation in Scotland respectively on the logistics and financial costs of getting to Strasbourg. After discussions, it was felt that we could have a useful trip to Brussels in the week beginning 4 March. I do not know how fixed that date is.

Stephen Imrie: The date is not fixed. I have said to members individually that we will try to accommodate different requests about who members want to meet. We might have to consider different dates if the people whom members want to meet are not available. The week beginning 4 March is the likely date—that is our best guess.

Ben Wallace: Obviously, the visit to Europe will tie in with our future work programme. Before we deal with that, it is important that we deal with our current work programme, which goes back to the committee's beginnings, when we had many reporters. Much work has been scrapped and much of it has not, but not much is happening to it. When members move on, work either falls to the clerks or just floats around. It might be best to reconsider our current work programme—which has many gaps—and decide what we should scrap. There is no point in creating a new work programme if 50 per cent of the old programme was scrapped.

The Convener: We discussed the work programme at the previous meeting. We noted that a number of reports remain outstanding, principally because committee members who undertook to act as rapporteurs moved to other committees. Tavish Scott's report springs to mind. We noted that those reports are outstanding, but I do not see why they should not be finished off, if the clerks have time to do it. Not long ago, I had a word with Tavish Scott and told him that I hoped that his report would be finished. Another report that we agreed to try to finish is Sylvia Jackson's

review of the sixth environmental action programme. The committee should not simply abandon outstanding reports.

Ben Wallace: I am conscious that the report on the euro was handed to the clerks. The clerks must prepare reports, but perhaps members should do the reports that deal with political issues. We had the nightmare of going through every line of the report on the euro, which was partly my fault. Handing reports over lock, stock and barrel to the clerks—without someone to guide them—is not fair to them.

There is also the Laeken report to consider.

The Convener: I am not sure whether you are volunteering for work or whether you want to do away with some of the reports that are on the committee's agenda.

Ben Wallace: We should decide who is going to complete the reports. Should the committee as a whole complete them, should we have a rapporteur or should we leave it up to the clerks to produce a draft that the committee then spends a number of weeks picking over?

The Convener: At the previous meeting, we noted that a number of reports are outstanding. We agreed to write to the conveners of the subject committees to get a feel for the work that they will undertake during the following year. The Commission's work programme was attached to the letter. I hoped that we would have an early report on the future work programme, but we cannot do that until we have replies from the conveners of the other committees. When we have the replies, we can review the outstanding work. We discussed at the previous meeting the principle of rapporteurs. I would be happy if members were willing to take up any of the outstanding reports or to do follow-up reports. We could discuss that at the next meeting, at which I hope to have more information on the forward work programme.

We intend the work programme to be flexible until we have had further discussions in Brussels with European Commission and Parliament officials. After that, we can tighten up some of the areas that our inquiries might examine. As I said, I am interested in holding an inquiry on employment, but colleagues might have different ideas. We can firm up our ideas when we are in Brussels having meetings on subjects in which we have an interest.

14:45

Ben Wallace: I want to see what we can achieve. We have a large list, which includes two hefty reports. The work programme as it was drafted a fortnight ago is pretty big. Will we get

through that programme by the end of this parliamentary session?

The Convener: We need to assimilate all the information that we will receive from other committees' feedback, from the Commission's work programme for the year and from our meetings in Brussels. When we have done that, we can decide on our priorities. We might not be able to do everything, but we will at least set a time scale for our priorities. I would like to do that in accordance with members' interests.

Perhaps members could volunteer to take on—separate from our full committee inquiries—matters on which opinion has been expressed. Some members might have been put off by the volume of work that other members have had to endure. Dennis Canavan and Ben Wallace could comment on that—they have had to produce substantial reports for the committee. We need to balance members' interests with the key direction that the committee wants to take in the next year. However, I doubt that we have enough information today—some members do not have last week's papers with them. We need to discuss the matter when all the information is available to us. We probably cannot finalise arrangements until we return from Brussels. If members are happy, an interim report can be produced for the committee once we receive the feedback from subject committee conveners. That might help to inform our discussion.

Mr Quinan: Following on from what Ben Wallace and the convener said, although we have a fairly packed programme, matters will also crop up on which it is important that we are seen to achieve a tangible result this year. I refer to two things. First, the bid for Euro 2008 is clearly within the external affairs remit. That is an important issue for many people in this country. A decision will be made on the bid within the next month. The bid should be a priority for the committee, because it will be a subject of discussion among the lieges in the country. In the light of this morning's somewhat contradictory press releases from the Irish Government and the Executive, we need to get on top of the situation immediately—

The Convener: Let me just stop you there, Lloyd. The Euro 2008 bid is not in our work programme.

Mr Quinan: That is what I mean. Euro 2008 is an issue that is of great importance to people. We need to do something practical about that.

I have a second suggestion. I have become aware that, although free movement of domestic animals is now allowed between the UK and the European Union, such movement is not possible from any port or airport in Scotland. The committee could usefully get behind that issue. It

would be good for the committee and for the Parliament if we were to get a positive response, such as an agreement that free movement of domestic animals would be allowed from a port in Scotland that has a direct connection to Europe. At the moment, such movement is allowed from Gatwick, from Heathrow, via Eurotunnel, from Harwich, Dover and Hull, but not from Scotland. If we deal with that issue, we might achieve a practical and tangible end.

The Convener: I do not disagree that we need to do something that is achievable, practical and relevant. That is one reason why, at our previous meeting, I suggested that we should examine employment. However, I feel that we might be straying somewhat. Perhaps Lloyd Quinan is indicating that he would like to develop that subject through meetings in Brussels. At the moment, we are supposed to be discussing our trip to Brussels. Would you like to explore that area during our trip to Brussels, Lloyd?

Mr Quinan: Both of the areas that I have mentioned need to be explored further. We must meet the Irish and find out what is going on. I also suggest that we meet the Austrians and the Swiss—well, perhaps not the Swiss, but definitely the Austrians, although we could meet the Swiss as well—to find out how confident they are.

The Convener: I have a feeling that our trip is turning into a pseudo-football trip.

Sarah Boyack: We are straying into the discussion that we had at our previous meeting. I suspect that we could add new current issues to the list every two weeks. I have e-mailed the clerks about my particular interests for our trip to Brussels—if, indeed, we go to Brussels—but what is the best process for organising the trip? To what extent will we have individual meetings? Is the purpose of the trip to interrogate people in Brussels en masse?

I would also like to meet people from other political groups when we are in Brussels, but I am finding it difficult to organise meetings, as we have not confirmed when we are to go. I would like to get a sense of the structure of the trip that we are putting together, as I do not want to arrange meetings that will clash with something that the clerks have arranged in good faith. Could we focus on how we are going to run the trip?

The Convener: Sarah Boyack raises a valid point about which week we are to go to Brussels. The Committee of the Regions will meet during the week beginning 11 March—I have not mentioned that to Stephen Imrie yet. It might be useful to meet members of other European committees, regional governments and political groups. I know that political group meetings are always held during Committee of the Regions weeks. The

meetings do not involve MEPs, who are in Strasbourg on the Wednesday and the Thursday; they involve regional and local government members. If members want to spend a couple of days watching how the Committee of the Regions operates, attending political group meetings and meeting counterparts from other regional governments, we could investigate the possibility of going during that week. However, I have not discussed that option with the clerks and I do not know how much planning they have done for the week beginning 4 March.

Perhaps Stephen Imrie could say a little about the interests that members have indicated. We should be able to combine committee meetings—that is, attending meetings as a full committee, perhaps on our governance report—with subgroup meetings. That approach worked quite well on our previous visit, when members indicated an interest in and attended meetings on employment or the environment. If time permits, and subject to the agreement of Commission officials, we could set up some pertinent and useful meetings. We propose to bring a draft programme to the next meeting; in order to do so, members must indicate their individual interests to the clerk, as we also propose to hold full committee meetings with colleagues who are interested in governance.

Stephen Imrie: I will advise members on our latest thinking and on the e-mails and expressions of interest in meeting people that I have received from members.

As the committee has yet to make a decision, I cannot say that the subjects for inquiry are definite. I took it from the previous committee meeting and from previous discussions that there was an interest in employment, the intergovernmental conference and follow-up work on the future of Europe, as well as in post-2006 regional development structural funds and the potential reductions in budgets for Scotland. That suggests that the whole committee should attempt to meet Commissioner Barnier, who has responsibility for the IGC and regional development, and either Commissioner Diamantopoulou, who is the commissioner for employment and social affairs, or the director general for employment and social affairs. Those are the areas in which members have indicated a collective interest. Sarah Boyack has expressed a particular interest in environmental matters—her e-mail is the only one that I have received.

I propose to put together a programme and send it to members in the next day or so—we have some drafts available. If a number of members—in other words, not just one member—are interested in following up the extra issues, we will break the committee into sub-groups and will take small parties away.

We can do two things with an individual area of interest. As clerks, we are happy to try to open doors to the people whom members would like to meet. We could accommodate members by taking minutes and notes and by helping to bring the meeting about—by making introductions, for example. However, we suggest that members who wish to follow up a personal or party matter should do that off their own bat.

We are deliberately putting large chunks of free time into the programme to allow members to undertake one-to-one meetings with MEPs or representatives of non-governmental organisations in Brussels whom they have a personal interest in meeting. I have taken on board from previous visits a request for flexibility in the programme to allow members to undertake off their own bat separate meetings on areas in which they are interested. The clerks are available to open doors for members. We will also try to ensure that the programme allows flexibility.

The Convener: That seems reasonable. Are arrangements still flexible enough to allow us to go either in the week beginning 4 March or in the week beginning 11 March? I go to the Committee of the Regions regularly, so I will be in Strasbourg during the week of 11 March. Would it be useful to go that week or would people prefer to go the week before, when they could meet parliamentarians?

Mr Quinan: We can hear back from members about the work of the Committee of the Regions. As we discussed when we put our report together, we are well aware that the Committee of the Regions will not necessarily exist in a couple of years.

The Convener: I doubt that.

Mr Quinan: It is good to have feedback on what the Committee of the Regions is doing at the moment. However, as the IGC is my particular area of interest, I am less interested in the Committee of the Regions than in the 29 individuals who will be part of the convention for the preparation of the constitution. I believe that the names of those individuals were announced on Thursday of last week.

On Friday, I attended a meeting in Brussels of groups that are interested in the IGC. I get the impression that, although it would be useful to meet the commissioner, it would be more useful to try to meet the individuals who will be part of the constitutional convention, because they represent a fairly broad political spectrum. Such a meeting might give us ideas about how we might access the constitutional convention. The principal concern of the meeting that I attended in Brussels was how stateless nations, autonomous regions and so on will be able to access the constitutional

convention.

Ben Wallace: I ask only that we speak to the Commission. Elizabeth Holt was very helpful last time. We should find out the practical implications. If it is harder to access Commission members when the Committee of the Regions is on—because they might be answering to the Committee of the Regions—I would suggest the week of 4 March. If it makes no difference, I am happy with either week. Access is the key for us—we want to meet the right people so that we can find out the right things.

15:00

The Convener: In that case, we will leave it to the clerks to sort things out. They will e-mail us as soon as possible. The key people whom members want to meet appear to be those in the Commission and the European Parliament. It sounds as if the week of 4 March is the most likely, because the following week those people will all be in Strasbourg. We will get Stephen Imrie to investigate that and to confirm the date with members. I repeat that, if members would like assistance with anything, they should e-mail the clerks as soon as possible.

That brings me to a point that I wanted to mention to members. It is actually under item 4 in the convener's recommendation document but I would like to discuss it now because it relates to the Brussels visit. It is suggested that we send the letter in annexe A of the document to the chairs of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament and the Permanent Committee on European Union and External Co-operation of the Catalan Parliament. The letter follows on from discussions that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have had in this area. Members will recall that President Pujol visited Scotland last year and extended an invitation to members of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to go to Catalonia. The Presiding Officer took that invitation up and I accompanied him at the weekend to Barcelona—

Ben Wallace: Not bad.

The Convener: It was all arranged before I became the convener of the committee. I was just filling in a slot.

I met the chairs of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament and the Permanent Committee on European Union and External Co-operation of the Catalan Parliament. Their ideas about collaboration and close working are interesting. I told them that we intended to visit Brussels in March and they expressed an interest in examining whether it would be possible to develop further links between other subject committees. I would be keen for any

links that were developed to have demonstrable practical benefits to the people of Scotland in relation to tourism, jobs and the sharing of best practice. We can explore the possibilities for making those links when we go to Brussels.

I am asking for the committee's approval to send the letter in annexe A with a view to setting up a meeting with the members of the Catalan and Flemish European committees when we go to Brussels.

Mr Quinan: I would like the opening line to be changed slightly so that, instead of "Catalan Parliament", it says "the Generalitat", which is what it is known as.

The Convener: When I was in Barcleona, we all spoke about the Catalan Parliament, but we will check that and ensure that we address the body in the correct way.

Mr Quinan: Who was talking about the Catalan Parliament—those who spoke English or those who spoke Spanish and Catalan?

Ben Wallace: "Generalitat" sounds to me like it is in trade union language.

Mr Quinan: Catalunya has an exceedingly right-wing Government, Ben, with which you would be very happy.

Dennis Canavan: Who visited the Catalan Parliament? The letter says, "our recent visit".

The Convener: The delegation was led by the Presiding Officer. There were a number of officials, including Paul Grice, Stephen Imrie and Sarah Davidson, who is working on the Holyrood project.

Dennis Canavan: It is interesting that this is the first that I have heard of this trip. I do not recall it being approved by the Parliament. Was it one of those things that are cooked up by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body?

The Convener: As I said, it was all arranged before I became convener. Perhaps Stephen Imrie has information that he can give to the committee on the matter.

Stephen Imrie: It is not for me to comment on the procedures by which such delegations are put together. However, I understand that the matter was discussed in the Parliamentary Bureau. The report on the visit is available on the Parliament's intranet and contains notes of meetings and details of who went on the trip. The invitation was extended to Hugh Henry in his capacity as the convener of the committee.

Dennis Canavan: Who extended the invitation to him?

Stephen Imrie: I believe that it was extended by the Presiding Officer.

The Convener: At this point, we should be asking ourselves whether the proposed visit will benefit the people of Scotland and fit in with our work programme.

Are members content to send the letter and to meet with the chairs of the Catalan and Flemish European committees when we go to Brussels?

Mr Quinan: I am whole-heartedly behind the proposal. I just make the plea that we do not confine ourselves as we appeared to do last year, when we had discussions with the Flemings and the Catalans only. Our connections with Catalunya are only in the area of financial services. We could learn a lot more from other regions of Spain, especially those that are post-industrial, much like us, and operate in the same areas. In the past, we have been in competition with those regions for structural funds. We should be aware of the asymmetrical nature of the devolution settlement in Spain. The settlement is different in relation to the 17 autonomous regions and the emphasis on Catalunya can give a false view of the general attitude in Spain to the European Union. The Catalans have a specific approach.

The Convener: I do not disagree with the principle of extending the meeting to include other regions. A delegation from Sachsen-Anhalt visited the committee and the Parliament and representatives from a number of states and regions, including Sweden and North Rhine-Westphalia, gave evidence during our governance inquiry. There are a number of potential links and it might be that, as we decide on our priorities for next year, we will want to form links with some regions rather than others.

Mr Quinan: We must remember that the Galicians gave evidence to the committee via satellite link. As we have already made a link and asked them for something, it is important that we give something back and maintain the link. That link also relates directly to issues such as the environmental side of the fishing industry.

The Convener: We need to consider what criteria to use for making links and decide how to fit those around our areas of interest. Sachsen-Anhalt is one of the regions that are linked with enlargement to the east and that have received demonstrable benefits from Europe. I would be interested in exploring some of those links.

Sarah Boyack: I come back to the point about criteria. There are two sorts of criteria. The first involves governance issues, including the issues that we are going to pick up on in Brussels on the IGC and on where Europe is going and how some nation states or regions relate to the national states as they are recognised by Europe. Secondly, there are the subject issues where there might be cross-regional interests—employment,

our transforming economy and cracking the problem of recycling, for example. We might like to link with different regions in different ways. One of the issues that I would be interested in picking up when we are in Brussels is how the relationships between Parliaments are structured and to what extent we link into the European Parliament. I have found that MEPs are interested in issues that they pick up from their committees but that are relevant to our Parliament.

I would support the proposals in the letter but there are other issues and I would not like the committee to create those links exclusively. Over time, the Parliament will want to build broader links and we have to work out what the criteria should be and how they should guide us so that we are more focused. When people come back from holiday, for example, they have a list of ideas of places that they would like to go to again because they looked interesting. Our challenge is to be a bit more focused. Perhaps that could link into our work programme, when we get around to considering it. We need to decide with which European states or regions we could do good work.

The Convener: I agree with those points.

Dennis Canavan: On the possibility of our joining COSAC—the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union—I do not recall why our suggestion was turned down the last time. Was any specific reason given as to why the French presidency turned down our proposal? If we are going to persuade the powers that be to think again, we ought to be aware of the arguments that were used against us last time. If such arguments still prevail, we might be as well going for the other option, which was to seek the formation of a network of legislatures within devolved Administrations.

The Convener: I can see the advantage of that. I think that the argument was that membership was restricted to member states, as opposed to sub-member states or regions. There is merit in Dennis Canavan's suggestion, which is included in the report. We could spend a long time arguing about the principle but, as Dennis Canavan says, perhaps the thing to do is to get on and make links with those regions that are interested in the same things as we are.

That has been a useful discussion. I would like to note the launch date of Ben Wallace's excellent report on EU enlargement.

Dennis Canavan: I have one point to raise on that. Was the venue as well as the date of the launch decided at the December meeting? I am grateful to Liz Holt for offering us the use of her offices and a light lunch, but we are a

parliamentary committee and we have a duty to monitor European institutions and to be critical where necessary. Parliamentary reports should be launched from a Parliament building. I wonder whether it is wise to allow a European Union institution to host the launch of such an important report. We do not want to appear to be the mouthpiece of any EU institution. I expect that it is too late to do something about the venue this time, but perhaps that is something that we should bear in mind in future.

The Convener: More consultation on the date might have been helpful, because I know that it is posing problems for several people. I am in Brussels on Thursday and will be unable to attend. I understand that the Commission offered its offices to host the launch and it was felt that the flags and so on would make the location rather photogenic. However, I take your point, Dennis.

Ben Wallace: We are in the same situation in relation to the date and the venue; we did not discuss either at the December meeting—they were decided by e-mail.

In the game of enlargement, the Commission plays the role of the referee; in effect, it is neutral. I would not feel awkward about it, because the Commission is simply the structure that allows the member states to negotiate with the applicants. The Commission does not have a position. Although it thinks that enlargement is a good thing, it does not have any views on which countries should come first or last. That is decided by the member states in conjunction with the applicants.

I agree with Dennis Canavan's point that we should be much more cautious in general. However, on this issue, the Commission is neutral, although there will be elements of our report that the Commission will not agree with.

The Convener: Surely not.

The arrangements were partly dictated by the fact that the Estonian ambassador was going to be in Scotland on that day, which might prove helpful in the launch of the report. I have taken on board the points that members have made. In future, we should ensure that members have an opportunity to comment on proposed dates. I hope that as many members as possible will be able to make the launch, which is at 1 o'clock on Thursday 31 January in the Commission offices on Alva Street. I am sorry that I will be in Brussels.

15:15

Mr Home Robertson: I will not—

Colin Campbell: Where is Alva Street?

Mr Quinan: How long have you been here?

Dennis Canavan: What is—

Mr Quinan: Have you not bought an "A to Z" of Edinburgh? It is pathetic. Alva Street is at the west end.

Colin Campbell: Lloyd Quinan has an "A to Z".

Mr Quinan: It is at the west end.

Ben Wallace: The west end is Leicester Square.

The Convener: Colleagues, the official report is trying to record several different conversations at once. Please address your comments through the chair.

I asked the clerks to bring us the dates of the forthcoming European Council of the EU. As we have discussed, can members bring proposals to an early meeting of the committee to discuss pre-Council and post-Council briefings? We have the list of meetings and we need to discuss agendas. The clerks can bring us more information about what might come up, so that the committee can decide whether to invite ministers along in order to investigate any items with a Scottish perspective.

Mr Quinan: Can we ask the clerks to get us a full list of the proposed meetings between the Executive and the Irish Government on the bid for Euro 2008? It is a matter of urgency, as a decision will be taken at the end of February.

The Convener: I am not sure that that is in the committee's remit. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee may be responsible.

Mr Quinan: This is exactly the kind of issue that I had in mind at our previous meeting when I asked for clarification of the committee's remit in respect of external affairs. If the issue is a political hot potato for certain elements in the Parliament, that is fine. However, if we are to scrutinise external affairs, it is essential that we are aware of every element of the joint bid, which will take money out of the Parliament for a tournament that comes under the rules not of the European Union, but of another European structure. Admittedly, the other country that is involved is a member of the European Union.

The matter has not been off the back, front or inside pages of our newspapers for nearly four months and interest in it will increase. If we are saying, as a committee that has just asked for the right to scrutinise external affairs, as we have the agreement of the Executive to do—

The Convener: Just a minute, Lloyd. We do not yet have that remit. The matter is with the Procedures Committee.

Mr Quinan: Will we have that remit following the Procedures Committee's debate on Thursday?

The Convener: We will have to check. I was not aware that the debate would be held as soon as that. The remit would have to be agreed by all

committee members, because the matter is being thrown into the pot as part of our work programme. At our previous meeting, we agreed that we would write to the conveners of the subject committees, assess the information when it came back and decide our work programme from there. I suggest that we wait until we receive responses from the conveners of the subject committees before we decide what to do.

Dennis Canavan: I take on board what the convener says, but there is some merit in Lloyd Quinan's suggestion. It remains to be seen what decision the Parliament will take on the possibility of the committee having a wider role with regard to external relations. There is certainly an external relations element in a joint bid by Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. Participation in Euro 2008 is much wider than the member states of the European Union. However, if the Parliament decides that the committee should have a wider role with regard to external affairs, and if the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is not enthused about taking up the matter, there may be a role for the European Committee.

The Convener: Lloyd Quinan, Colin Campbell, John Home Robertson and Ben Wallace all want to contribute. Before I bring them in, I want to say two things. First, the clerk has clarified that our altered remit will not be brought before the Parliament in the Procedures Committee debate on Thursday. That matter is still outstanding and will continue to be after Thursday. Secondly, we have never undertaken an inquiry that has encroached on another subject area without consulting—

Dennis Canavan: What about football transfers?

The Convener: That was discussed with the relevant committee first—that is my point. We also discussed fishing, but, again, we did so with the agreement of the relevant committee.

Mr Quinan: We have an informal agreement with the Executive for the committee's remit to be extended. It would be legally correct to say that we do not have responsibility for external affairs at this stage, but we might take on that responsibility before 28 February, the date on which the decision will be made. I am not asking for an inquiry to be undertaken; I am suggesting that we should simply ask the clerks to contact the Executive and ask for the details of the meetings that are being held in relation to the bid. In that way, we can scrutinise the Executive.

The Convener: The problem is that we do not have the remit to perform that scrutiny. If we had that remit, it would be different.

Mr Quinan: Please let me finish what I was saying. I prefaced my remarks by pointing out that,

in a strictly legal sense, we do not have that responsibility. However, given that our remit is up for discussion, I suggest that it would be insensitive of us not at least to conduct an element of scrutiny prior to confirmation of our role in covering and scrutinising external affairs. The press may well be interested in whether the committee wishes actively to take on the role that it has sought.

The Convener: I think that the press would also want to know what will be happening with the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, which we would need to investigate, to be fair.

Colin Campbell: We are anticipating the actions of the subject committees at the moment, are we not?

The Convener: We are.

Colin Campbell: How soon can we get those committees to expedite their responses? What we are discussing is fairly urgent, whether we decide to go into the matter or not. Once in a while, we have to drop out of our work programme and pick up and run with what is very current. The bid will involve tourism, the economy and jobs, which are quite relevant to what the committee is about and to our relationship with Europe.

Mr Home Robertson: The fundamental point is that the Euro 2008 bid is a major initiative that was announced by the First Minister last week, or whenever it was. It might cost a lot of money and have substantial significance to Scotland. Self-evidently, it should be subject to scrutiny by the Parliament and the appropriate committee. The debate at this stage must be about which committee conducts that scrutiny, and in what format.

I propose that, at this stage, the convener should speak informally to the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. That committee may well want to conduct some sort of investigation or a one-off evidence session with the minister. If it does not want to do that, we could fill the gap. However, I would suggest that course of action at this stage.

Ben Wallace: Lloyd Quinan made a good point, and I also agree with John Home Robertson. I would have expected the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to deal with this matter, because, whatever happens to the bid, and whatever the political failures or successes, we must be in a position to learn how we can improve such bids in the future. I think that the matter belongs in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's remit, because that committee will be able to identify what may have failed or otherwise. I agree, however, that if the Education, Culture and Sport Committee does not take up the matter, we should consider it.

The point about the timing of the addition of external affairs to our brief is valid. Technically, the Executive need not reply to us about such issues. However, the matter requires to be handled with some urgency. It is interesting that the change will not be covered during the forthcoming Procedures Committee debate. The delay lies at the feet of the man who is now First Minister, who got the external affairs brief when he became Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs more than a year ago. He never replied to the committee to enable us to match his responsibilities. If such a reply had been forthcoming—the committee pursued the matter on three occasions—we would at least know where we stood and the Parliament would be able to take part in the process.

I am not sure of the exact details—is the bid that must be in by the end of February the formal bid?

Mr Quinan: It is the full, formal bid.

Dennis Canavan: The decision to submit a formal bid must be made by the end of February. A decision will be made on the bid some months later—in July, I think.

Ben Wallace: I am also convinced—

Mr Quinan: Just for clarification—

The Convener: We cannot have three people talking at once. Ben Wallace is speaking and Dennis Canavan kindly gave him some additional information.

Mr Quinan: That is what I am trying to do.

The Convener: Lloyd Quinan may come in after Ben Wallace has finished speaking.

Mr Quinan: I am giving Ben Wallace the confirmation that Dennis Canavan just kindly gave him. At the end of next month, we must name the stadiums for a joint bid. Because it is a joint bid, we must detail the split; if it were a single bid, we would not have to do that.

Ben Wallace: Where the stadiums are put is not a European issue—it is a Scottish sports issue.

Mr Quinan: Except that some of them will be in Ireland.

Ben Wallace: I have completely lost my train of thought. However, I think that the Executive has not yet worked out how it will put together the bid. This is a fresh announcement, which was made only last week. I know how slowly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and diplomatic circles work, so I would be surprised if there is anything in place for us to scrutinise. I have dealt with the Irish Government, which is not always particularly straightforward. However, we could do this work, if the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is not interested in doing it.

The Convener: And if it is in our remit. We are dependent on the Procedures Committee processing our request that our remit be extended to mirror the minister's external affairs brief. That has not yet been done; the matter is in the hands of the Procedures Committee. I do not want us to spend a great deal of time discussing matters that are not yet in our remit. However, I take on board what members are saying about the possibilities that exist if the Education, Culture and Sport Committee does not want to deal with the matter, and if the Procedures Committee extends our remit timeously.

Mr Quinan: I would like clarification of what we are talking about. I simply asked for the clerks to ask the Executive for a diary of events relating to the bid that is to be made at the end of February. I did not ask for an inquiry; I asked for some straightforward information. What is the problem with that?

The Convener: If committees of the Parliament asked for information that was outside their remit, there would be a problem.

Mr Quinan: Are you, as the convener of this committee, saying that, even though we know that we will be confirmed as the committee of the Parliament that is responsible for external affairs, you are not prepared to do something that you consider to be technically outside our remit? Is that your position, despite the fact that the Executive and the committee have agreed to the extension of our remit, and despite the fact that, as Ben Wallace pointed out, the previous Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs spent a year failing to come up with a definition of the external affairs remit? That delay, in effect, put back by a year our ability to expand our remit.

The Convener: I want to abide by the standing orders and rules and regulations of the Parliament. That is not unreasonable. It is the job of a convener to do that.

Colin Campbell: You have probably said this already, but if the Procedures Committee confirms the extension to our remit, will there be time in our work programme to deal with this matter, even in a modest way?

The Convener: That is a reasonable suggestion. The matter is in the hands of committee members. I would not want to take such a decision; I would be happy to consult members of the committee on doing what Colin Campbell suggests, provided that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee decides not to deal with the matter.

Sarah Boyack: I support John Home Robertson's proposal. Through the convener, we should seek clarification from the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of whether it wants

to chase this issue. That would be the fastest way of dealing with the matter. In two weeks' time we can take a view on what happens next.

The Convener: I think that we are all agreed.

I thank members for their attendance and note that the next meeting of the committee will be on 12 February.

Meeting closed at 15:29.

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