

# **EUROPEAN COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 21 May 2002  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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## **EUROPEAN COMMITTEE** 8<sup>th</sup> 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)

### **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

\*attended

### **WITNESS**

Philippe Cichowicz (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe)

### **CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Stephen Imrie

### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

David Simpson

### **LOCATION**

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### European Committee

Tuesday 21 May 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:07]

**The Convener (Irene Oldfather):** I welcome members to the European Committee's eighth meeting of 2002. I have received apologies from Helen Eadie, Colin Campbell, Dennis Canavan and Lloyd Quinan, so our number is a little depleted.

I understand that Helen Eadie and Colin Campbell have gone to Russia, but I am not sure whether they are on the same trip. If they are, the plug that we gave Helen Eadie's trip at the previous meeting worked. She may have found a colleague in Colin to accompany her.

Helen Eadie is particularly sorry not to be present today, because we will hear from a representative of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe, an organisation with which she has had a long relationship. She asked me to pass on her thanks to its representative for coming to the meeting.

## Cohesion Policy and Structural Funds Inquiry

**The Convener:** We will now take evidence for our inquiry into the future of structural funds post-2006. I welcome Philippe Cichowlaz to the meeting and thank him for travelling so far to join us.

Bienvenue en Ecosse. Nous avons attendu avec impatience votre visite et l'avis de la CRPM sur ce sujet important. Dans quelques instants je vais vous donner la parole.

Je vais continuer en anglais pour mes collègues.

The CPMR is well known throughout Europe and the committee wishes to have not only a Scottish perspective on structural funds, but a pan-European view. I am sure that Philippe Cichowlaz will be able to give an overview of how other regions in Europe are tackling the question of structural funding post-2006.

I understand that Philippe Cichowlaz will give an overview of the CPMR as an organisation and will talk a little about regional development and how that debate is unfolding throughout Europe. Stephen Imrie has a few instructions on how to use the machines that relay the interpretation. The committee seems to be extending information technology to its limits with our videoconferencing and simultaneous interpretation.

**Stephen Imrie (Clerk):** Members should have the necessary equipment for listening to the interpretation. If you are an English speaker, you should listen to channel 2. If you are a French speaker, you should listen to channel 3. If you have any problems with the equipment, please indicate that to a clerk, who will try to resolve the problem for you.

**The Convener:** I assume that everything is working okay and that Philippe Cichowlaz can hear the interpretation in French. Philippe has the floor.

**Philippe Cichowlaz (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe):** I thank the committee for its kind invitation. I am sorry, but I will speak later in French, to ensure that what I say is clear, because the subject is difficult.

I am a director in the CPMR's general secretariat and I have been in charge of regional policy for five years. I will present a résumé of the position that our political bureau and our general assembly took at our most recent general assembly, which was in 2001. That proposal was presented to Commissioner Barnier, other commissioners and states around Europe. Afterwards, if members agree, I can give some

information about the negotiations. I will do my best to answer all your questions on the subject.

*The witness continued in French (simultaneous interpretation).* In the debate on the future of regional policy, the European Commission has often insisted on the requirement to think about the European Union's needs before one broaches budgetary elements or methodologies. When we made our second proposal on the reform of regional policy, we organised it into four strands. First, what are the foreseeable needs for the social, economic and territorial cohesion of Europe at the horizon of 2007? What policy could we promote to meet the needs and challenges? What budget is necessary to meet those needs? What kind of governance of the European Union is needed to guarantee the success of the political project?

When the gross domestic products of the regions of the EU 27 are analysed, they show five stages of regional convergence, broadly speaking. One category of regions had GDPs in 1999 that were an average of 40 per cent below the Community average. Those regions are mainly the outermost areas that will be covered by enlargement, such as the Baltic states, Hungary, Bulgaria and the most northern areas of Poland and Slovakia. It will take at least two generations for those regions to achieve a reasonable and acceptable state of development and to catch up. They lag behind.

There is a second category of regions whose GDP is between 40 per cent and 75 per cent of the EU average. Those regions, such as the east of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, are mostly in central Europe and will be part of the EU after enlargement. However, some current regions of the EU will remain eligible, including a few Greek regions, some regions in southern Italy, some in Spain and Portugal and some of the ultra-peripheral regions. It will take one or two generations for the economic performance of those regions to catch up.

14:15

The third category of regions in the EU 27 comprises those regions that are at the third stage of development and whose GDP is 75 per cent to 100 per cent of the Community average. Again, there is a great disparity of situations among those regions. The majority will be peripheral regions, some of which will be only mechanically or statistically above 75 per cent of the EU average. A large part of Scotland will fall within that category.

Each of those regions will have its own specificities. In the south of Europe, many such regions will depend on a mono-industry, which will

mainly be tourism or activities that are linked to agriculture or rural development. Some mono-industrial regions that have not completed their reconversion will be part of that category as well. There will be some regions with accentuated peripherality, especially in northern Europe. One can imagine that those regions will take at least one generation to reach a level of competitiveness that is equivalent to European standards.

Another category of regions includes those whose GDP is between 100 per cent and 130 per cent of the Community average. Again, those regions contain a large diversity of situations. For example, the capital cities of the peripheral regions, such as Madrid and Porto in the south of Europe, fall within that category, but so do some northern European cities. Some central and intermediary regions with an industrial tradition have great poverty but are not remote regions in their respective countries.

Conversely, the wealthiest regions in Europe are those whose GDP is above 130 per cent of the Community average. Those regions are the most competitive in Europe but some of them are confronted with environmental problems, transport congestion and difficult social situations in the city centres. Solving those problems will be part of the rebalancing of areas in Europe.

According to which rules should all that be balanced? The proposal that we are working on is to pursue the policy of objective 1 for regions in the first and second categories—in other words, those whose GDP is below 75 per cent of the EU average. For the regions in the third, fourth and fifth categories, we aim to reinvent the policy for objective 2. The new policy would be widely different from today's policy. I shall return to that point later.

On the maintenance of a single set of criteria to determine which regions are covered by objective 1, it seems important that we have one set of criteria for the whole of the European territory. We should not have separate criteria for the candidate countries.

However, we need to take into account the regions that, statistically, will no longer be eligible for structural funding. We know that eligibility for the post-2006 period will be calculated on the basis of a Europe of 25 member states and will not include Bulgaria and one other region. However, we also know that about 15 regions will no longer be eligible because of the mechanics of enlargement. In other words, those regions will be ineligible not because of improved economic performance but because of the statistical effects of enlargement.

A second question that relates to objective 1 regions concerns the relevance of maintaining a 4

per cent ceiling of Community aid. That question is more important than it seems as it has repercussions for the amounts that will be given to regions with objective 1 and objective 2 status. The capacity to co-finance those regions is so low that expenditure per inhabitant will be much lower than it was for regions of previous accession countries—the figure might have been more than €300 for the regions of the south of Europe, but there might be only €150 in the new regions. In other words, aid per capita will be much lower than it currently is. A central question is whether there should be a cohesion fund for the poorest enlargement countries, even if there is 100 per cent co-funding for structure and transport, for example, to maintain European cohesion. Should we maintain that ceiling, which was suitable but which will perhaps no longer be suited to the new situation? That debate is on-going.

We are trying to promote a new objective 2 policy for territorial cohesion or regional competitiveness. Aside from the enlargement regions and the few regions that will remain eligible, there are still problems relating to competitiveness at European level that need to be resolved. An objective 2 policy that is more structured and European than it currently is would be more sustainable than a phasing-out solution, which would lead in 2013 to a total end of regional policies under objective 1. The policy should take into account regional handicaps. European regions are not equally competitive. We think that a new objective 2 status should apply particularly to low-density areas, islands and areas with altitude or relief problems. Some studies are being carried out in that respect at European Commission level. We are inclining in the direction of a specific instrument or perhaps a bonus for regional policy.

How can a new objective 2 policy be better linked with present Community initiatives that involve trans-border, transregional and interregional co-operation, for example? A new objective 2 policy must be simplified—that is necessary for its survival. The zoning system must be simpler and there must be simpler criteria. Everybody should agree to leave aside intraregional zoning and leave the regions with the opportunity of organising their territorial policies. Projects should be simpler. Currently, there is a criticism that administration costs are greater than the amounts that are involved in projects, so should there be a limitation on the number of projects? Should projects have a maximum size? Perhaps we should limit the number of projects that cost from €10,000 to €20,000 and perhaps the new objective 2 policy should be more structured.

The third simplification should be to ease the implementation of objective 2 by giving greater powers to the final beneficiaries, in particular to

the regions that would be charged with implementation under the Commission's control. For new objective 2 funding to be more efficient than before, it should be linked to stronger sectoral policies on transport, competitiveness, research and development, innovation, restructuring and the economy.

There are still some question marks over objective 3 funding. As education and training policies are a major feature of regional competitiveness, perhaps objective 3 should be territorialised and merged with objective 2. Indeed, the Commission is studying that possibility. The other question is how we can integrate objective 3 into objectives 1 and 2 and still enable the regions to implement programmes in co-ordination with national policies.

Three prerequisites must be met in such a scenario, the first of which is the progressiveness of Community aid to ensure that a concentration of regions is eligible for stages 1 and 2 of objective 1 funding. There must be variation in the intensity of Community aid in accordance with simple criteria of regional competitiveness. Such criteria have not been used before and could include accessibility, innovation and research and development potential. However, we have a year in which to define those criteria within the European Spatial Planning Observation Network programme, and the Commission has launched a couple of studies to find out whether new territorial criteria should be used within the future regional policy framework.

Some work on the issue has already been carried out in the sixth interim report on the situation of the regions. I have produced a colour-coded map that shows the main competitive weaknesses of the European regions, which should give members an idea of the priority that could be given to some of those regions. As members will notice, Scotland features prominently in that map.

Greater knowledge of the regional situation is another prerequisite for the scenario that I have outlined. In addition to the ESPON work programme, the development of the European spatial development perspective and the capitalisation of Community initiatives, we must improve our knowledge of the polycentric scenarios that the ESDP favours for more balanced territorial development in Europe.

Such a structure would allow us to envisage a European project for all the territories. Even if the funding is more symbolic than anything else, it is important that all European citizens benefit from it. Moreover, we must reinforce the role of the regions in implementing policies to ensure greater legibility of the added value of the Community. Another virtue of such an architecture would be the spatial visions for better governance,

particularly in relation to sectoral policies.

On the budget, we made calculations at the beginning, but things are moving all the time. If we do not respect the 4 per cent ceiling that I mentioned, enlargement should cost about €35 billion a year over the next period. The cost of objective 1 for the EU 15 is about €10 billion, with €3 billion for phasing out. The cost of objective 2 funding should be between €13 million and €25 million, according to the importance of the project.

Given those assumptions, the maintenance of a budget of 0.45 per cent would not allow us to fulfil those needs. However, the Commission claims that, if there were reduced aid for the candidate countries, it would be possible to stay within the threshold of 4 per cent. Nevertheless, it seems to us that that the budget might realistically increase to 0.55 per cent, which would meet the needs of enlargement and of the current regions of the EU and would allow us to deal with a greater number of problems than we do at present. With less money, we cannot see how we could deal with more problems in a much larger territory.

14:30

Discussions on the budget cannot be dissociated completely from discussions on the future of the common agricultural policy, which might give us more margin for manoeuvre. Similarly, the discussions cannot be separated from the discussion of Community credit, for which the Berlin Council ensured a ceiling of 1.27 per cent of EU GDP for the budgets. The difference between providing 0.55 per cent of GDP and providing 0.45 per cent for objective 1 and 2 would allow us to fulfil an ambitious regional policy. Similarly, the issue cannot be separated from the general debate on widening European integration, which will be mentioned at the next intergovernmental conference. The debate is political and goes way beyond the problems of regional policies.

A lot of progress is still to be made on governance in relation to sectoral and regional policies, both by the Commission and by member states. Sometimes, the impact of Community policies goes against the impact of territorial coherence. That applies, for example, to research and development and transport policies. We do a lot of work on transport and we believe that the trans-European network is not very ambitious because it does not favour the outermost regions. Other policies that have an impact are those on competition and taxation—it would take too long to discuss them, but future zoning will be extremely important in the new negotiations. Other examples are the policies on education and training—we saw the effect of objective 3—and the environment.

We hope that the white paper on governance in the European Union will ensure some virtuous principles for the governance of the European and national frameworks. Two measures are required for that. First, we must improve the programming links between European, state and regional levels. In that regard, we are considering tripartite contracts, by which, in a given territory, each of the main partners would agree a negotiated objective. To improve efficiency, Europe should capitalise on national experiences of involving territorial authorities. There should be greater co-ordination between the various tiers of government on the framework of policies with a territorial impact.

Subsidiarity and solidarity are indissociable concepts, which, although they sometimes seem to be in conflict, should not be separated. There is often a strong debate about the German position. The Germans advocate more subsidiarity, but without emphasising solidarity, whereas it seems to us that the two go hand in hand.

In conclusion—if you will allow me a further minute—I draw your attention to a specific point on objective 1. Discussions on objective 1 are mainly of a financial nature, but we find a common voice at European level on the need to make an increasing effort for the candidate countries. The main question mark is over the future of objective 2, which is directly of interest to the committee. There are five types of regions, which are more or less clear, according to the various positions that have been taken by the national Governments.

Some net contributors no longer want objective 2—Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, for example. That is the stated position of the national Governments of those countries, but it is not necessarily the position of their regions. The eastern Länder support the maintenance of objective 2, because they could be beneficiaries if objective 2 remains. The northern and central regions of Sweden are also of that opinion. In the Netherlands, the situation is more difficult. Most of the territorial actors are keen on territorial policies and have great knowledge of the programmes, but the views of the territorial authorities and those of the Ministry of Finance do not necessarily coincide.

Some contributor countries—Belgium and Finland—are in favour of pursuing objective 2. We do not know what the position of the countries that receive cohesion funding will be. They will defend objective 1 for sure, but do they want objective 2 to be phased out—we are thinking of Spain in particular in that category—or do they want a longer-term objective 2? The situation is not clear.

The enlargement countries have a lot to do with objective 1, but they have not taken a position. Three borderline countries—the UK, France and



Italy—will be important in the negotiations. They are rich countries, but have diverse regional situations and have no official position. We hope that the new Prime Minister of France will pursue the path that he chose when he was a member of the CPMR. Italy seems to be mainly in favour of pursuing objective 2. At the moment, the British Government does not seem to be in favour of pursuing objective 2.

The issue that will arise—and I am thinking of Scotland—is that it is important to know how the discussions will take place around the abandonment or otherwise of objective 2 regions. Some people advocate a rationalisation of policies. If policies are abandoned, there will be a necessary national transfer of budgets for the same amount. There is no guarantee that there will be the same solidarity at the national level. The debate will take place around those questions. Thank you for your attention.

**The Convener:** That was a comprehensive and informative presentation, with a great deal of information. Many of the ideas, thoughts and suggestions were new to us, although other witnesses have come before us to give us their ideas. Please forgive us if in the questioning we go over some of the things that you talked about, but there is a lot to deal with.

One idea that you did not mention—it is being discussed in some regions in Europe and it was certainly discussed at the last round of structural fund negotiations—is that of a policy instrument or a structural fund instrument to deal with asymmetric shocks to regional economies. Have you come across that idea? Is there any support for that? As you are aware, policy instruments and structural fund instruments tend to be inflexible.

For example, we have had experience of major flooding in Scotland. Some regions in Finland were affected by the collapse of the economies in the Soviet Union, which led to high unemployment. Those things happened to regional and local economies. Have you come across any arguments on the idea of an instrument to deal with such policy issues?

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** (*simultaneous interpretation*) You are absolutely right. The idea of such an instrument falls within the discussion of the future of objective 2. There are three scenarios. One is purely and simply that objective 2 be abandoned. Another scenario is that we support a toolbox that would consist of seven or eight different initiatives—such as an urban initiative, an initiative for the islands and an initiative for innovation—which would be offered to the regions or states. They would be able to choose from the toolbox according to the national criteria for eligibility or the type of action required. There would perhaps be some benchmarking

among the various regions and that would be the end. We are calling for something more structural and—as the word “structural” implies—long term.

You refer to an instrument for use in reaction to sudden catastrophes and crises. That could be imagined under either of the first two scenarios. Some people are thinking about that. Under the first or second scenario, one could imagine a structural intervention in the case of a crisis or catastrophe. The only difficulty is that nobody has taken a position on the instrument because there is a big difficulty determining the indicators that should be taken into account to define a structural crisis. How should it be managed with the national budgets? Will the political negotiation be compatible with leaving the European Commission, which would give aid to crises on a case-by-case basis, large room for manoeuvre?

There are two types of argument. Some say that we can always keep a small instrument for such intervention. Those who are against it think that it is better to prepare for the future than to keep the money to answer the problems of the past. That is probably not a good way of ensuring that the regions can act as the fire brigade in a crisis situation. It is a delicate matter.

**The Convener:** We are having a little interference on our headphones, although we can still hear the interpretation. Perhaps the technicians could look into that while we discuss further questions. Before I open the questioning to my colleagues, I welcome to the committee the ambassador of Luxembourg to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Joseph Weyland. We are very pleased to have him with us and appreciate the interest that he is taking in our committee.

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I found your presentation interesting. You showed on the slides a predicted amount of money that would be required to run an effective regional policy and a predicted amount of money that would be required to run a really good regional policy. Will you tease out the distinctions between the levels of effectiveness of regional policy? You also made a connected point about the common agricultural policy. Did I read you correctly by thinking that you were floating the idea that there might be scope for reallocating funds at the European level, which might involve the CAP? If so, how realistic is that, given the different member states' interests in the CAP?

14:45

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** (*simultaneous interpretation*) A reallocation involving the CAP is a delicate subject. It will depend not so much on Community negotiations as on negotiations within the World Trade Organisation. If it is decided to reduce progressively support for prices, as was

discussed in previous rounds of WTO discussions, particularly those that took place in Doha, the Europeans will have to do the same. Support for prices is the main pillar of the CAP and represents its main expenditure.

Within the agriculture directorate-general, many people are talking of a switch between the first and second pillars of the CAP—in other words, a switch from price support to direct aid to farms. A general feeling exists that the future of the rural sector depends not just on agriculture but on other activities. Members perhaps remember objective 5b from a few years ago in the context of regional policy. That objective will disappear from regional policy and many people believe that a new objective 5b should increasingly become part of the common agricultural policy. The regional policy of competitiveness will be focused on strong, mainly urban elements and the CAP will support the development of territories.

All those developments are being discussed and little skirmishes are taking place between the regional policy directorate-general and the agriculture directorate-general about which directorate-general should be in charge of the policy. Each directorate-general is claiming that the policy is within its remit.

All that will depend on the discussions that will take place between the United States and Europe on the evolution and the future of price support within the WTO. The United States has recently taken a new position of support for its agriculture sector. No one knows whether it will maintain that position or whether it is for the next few months only. The trend at European level is towards a reduction in the importance of price support and an increase in support to farms. That is essential in relation to the budget.

By 1999, following the Edinburgh agreements of 1992, we had reached a level of Community aid of 0.46 per cent of Community gross domestic product. At the Berlin summit, a reduction in Community aid for the EU 15 from 0.46 per cent of GDP in 1999 to 0.31 per cent in 2006 was agreed. We are maintaining a level of aid of 0.45 per cent because we are integrating within Community aid the instruments for pre-accession of the eastern European countries. The budget that served the EU 15 in 1999 will serve the EU 27 from 2006—we will maintain a budget level of 0.46 per cent of GDP when we move to an EU of 27 members and more after 2006.

It will be difficult to answer greater needs with a budget that is not increasing even slightly. Commissioner Barnier has fixed the level at 0.45 per cent, but some states have asked for it to be lower. The budgetary discussion will take place at the end of next year.

**The Convener:** I am interested that some states have asked for a level that is lower than 0.46 per cent. Which member states are interested in lowering the budget?

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** (*simultaneous interpretation*) The main state that is interested in lowering the budget is Germany, although it has not quite made that position official. Germany has some budgetary problems, but it is not the only country to experience them. Some countries, such as Germany, are fed up with paying the greater part of the European budget. Germany is therefore interested in reducing regional aid and the budget in general so that it can solve its own problems.

Sweden is also against increasing the percentage. I do not know what the other countries' positions are. For the most part, the others have not really taken an official position. However, today the trend is towards making savings rather than towards having the political will to pursue European integration as much as in the past. Perhaps that is contradictory, given the challenge of enlargement and the momentum of history, but budgetary requirements are coming to the fore.

**The Convener:** You have spoken about the member states having more control within the context of subsidiarity. Some of the evidence that we have taken in the past has dealt with the argument about renationalisation and giving priorities back to the member state. How will that argument develop across Europe?

In your presentation, you spoke about the three tiers working together. There seems to be an underlying argument that member states should take back some of the regional policy powers. They should get a block of money and prioritise that for their regions. How is that debate developing across Europe? There are differing views on that in the United Kingdom.

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** (*simultaneous interpretation*) The CPMR is totally against renationalisation of policies. Whatever criticisms can be laid at the door of regional policy, it has brought a lot to local and regional Parliaments. Whatever differences there have been, there have also been great strides forward in methods of programming and in the evaluation of public policies. All those elements have been quickly and neatly forgotten, but 10 years ago they did not exist. In the field of efficiency, Europe has helped the local territories and regions make a lot of progress beyond the budgetary discussion. Those are some of the important elements that have happened thanks to that policy.

The people and arguments that advocate renationalisation of regional policies do not do so for political reasons. They base their arguments on

economic and budgetary reasons. It seems to me that there is a strong contradiction between the pursuing of regional policies and renationalisation. At the moment, the gap between territories and regions is infra-national. Europe therefore has a role to play in co-ordinating the member states.

When we try to protect the better co-ordination between the three tiers, it is to prevent a situation in which one tier pulls the action towards one end when another is pulling it towards another and then nothing happens. It is important to balance and to follow a common path in order to ensure greater efficiency. That seems to us to be at the centre of the debate.

Within the Commission and particularly within DG regio—apart from a few people—the majority of people are against renationalisation at the moment. They are in favour of pursuing objective 2. However, there is always a dichotomy between political prospects and budgetary constraints. Renationalisation means more policies.

**The Convener:** In your presentation, you spoke about handicaps. You will be aware that, particularly in the north of Scotland, we face a number of handicaps. We have mountainous regions and a sparse population and those factors cause difficulties with matters such as transportation. Those problems are different from GDP but probably affect it. How confident are you that such issues will be taken into consideration when structural fund reforms are being reviewed?

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** (*simultaneous interpretation*) There are two on-going studies. One study, on the islands, was launched by the European Commission a few months ago. We are following the progress of that study and we are awaiting results. I do not yet know the content of the study or the findings.

However, as far as the islands are concerned, things are quite simple. We know what an island is and we know what type of problem an island confronts. The mountains are more difficult. A call to tender has been made and the first bids have been submitted. The final date has been postponed because of problems with methodology. It is difficult to establish criteria for the mountainous areas.

Technically, there are mountains in the alpine valleys that are extremely rich and have a high density of population. Should we go below the level of NUTS 3 to NUTS 4 or NUTS 5, which are more comparable with the level set by the EC? Should we compare the altitude with the population density to form a criterion?

Great strides forward have been made with some of the permanent problems, but it would be difficult to distribute money on the basis of that. Should there be a specific instrument for such low-

density regions as the islands or mountains? Alternatively, should we say that regions that contain a certain percentage of either islands or mountains and that have a certain level of GDP and a low-density population could have a bonus of 10, 20 or 30 per cent according to their GDP? That is what we have to think about.

The concept of bonuses would be more favourable than that of a specific instrument, because we could take, say, 1 per cent of the structural fund to give to insular or mountainous regions. However, that would not be very useful in the end. Whatever the type of instrument, it would be important to know what amount of money will be available to allow us to have efficient policies in those regions. I think that the ambitious scenario is better than the toolbox scenario, which I fear could be a device with very low budgetary endowment.

**The Convener:** As there are no other questions from members, I thank you for that interesting and informative presentation. We are drafting a report on these issues and the evidence that you have given us today will be helpful. I hope that we continue to have dialogue with the CPMR in the months ahead. I am sure that that pan-European view and analysis of how the negotiations are going is helpful to us.

I suggest that we take a two-minute break to allow us to deal with the IT and for M Cichowlaz to leave.

**Philippe Cichowlaz:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** I also thank the interpreter. She has been interpreting for an hour.

14:58

*Meeting suspended.*

15:03

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Since our last meeting we have received two written submissions, one from Clackmannanshire Council and another from Campbell Christie and Andrew Scott. Campbell Christie is a member of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union and I know that he is rapporteur for an opinion on economic and social cohesion. He made the written submission to the committee as part of the drawing together of information for his opinion. We had intended that today would be the last meeting at which we took evidence, but I am open to suggestions. Does the committee wish to invite Campbell Christie to the next meeting or are members satisfied to take his written evidence into account?

**Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Given the fact that the submission is fairly detailed

and that our next meeting is our last meeting before the summer recess, we should perhaps draw the evidence taking to a close. That would enable us to consider the draft report at our next meeting and to bring the inquiry to a close before the summer. The written evidence is reasoned and properly set out and there is no need to extend the timetable to take oral evidence.

**The Convener:** Okay. If there are no other views on that, we will incorporate the written evidence into our report and ask the clerks to produce a draft summary of all the evidence for the next meeting. I appreciate that the next meeting will be our last before the recess, so it would be helpful if we could pull together the draft report.

There is another matter on which we have not agreed. The employment inquiry is a very big piece of work and we must decide whether we want an adviser; it will mean a huge amount of work for the clerks if we do not. We have the facility in the budget to do so, particularly for such a large inquiry. Appointment of an adviser might expedite the gathering of evidence and would certainly lift some of the burden from the clerks.

If members think that it would be useful to appoint an adviser we could invite interested people to submit CVs. We could consider the matter at our next meeting and select someone who could consider the evidence over the recess. The call for evidence is open until September.

**Sarah Boyack:** That seems to be quite sensible and would give us some space. Given the weight of the day-to-day work that the committee is dealing with, extra assistance would be helpful in addressing the employment strategy. I note that we will begin to get more Council information during the summer, which will really kick in by the autumn. It is difficult to predict how much more energy that will require, but I suspect that it will take more committee time than is currently devoted to monitoring and scrutiny. It is a good idea to suggest potential advisers in time for the next meeting.

**Stephen Imrie:** We would be happy to suggest some names and speak to our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament information centre, which holds a database of people who have expressed interest in being committee advisers. I should advise the committee that there is another necessary step, which is to ask the Parliamentary Bureau for approval to appoint an adviser. I am not aware of an occasion on which such a request has been declined. I would be happy to do that on behalf of the committee.

**The Convener:** Okay.

**Ben Wallace:** On rounding up the inquiry into the cohesion policy, there are two significant points that have not come out previously. First, following discussion around the yet-to-be ratified Treaty of Nice, the next round of the European budget must be finalised before enlargement happens. Therefore, the people who sit round the table deciding the new budget will not necessarily gain from it. That was a concession to Spain in the Nice treaty negotiations. In drawing together the final report, I hope that we can reflect on what came out of Nice. Given that Spain is the country that is most likely to lose out, it is interesting that it has gained that concession, which means that the new countries will not be part of the debate.

**The Convener:** That sounds reasonable. We will ask the clerks to bring together information on that as background to the report. What is the second point?

**Ben Wallace:** It is on fishing, but I will not raise it as time is running out. Perhaps I could write to you.

## Europe Day (Feedback)

**The Convener:** We move on to item 2, which is feedback from Europe day. I think that everyone who participated will agree that it was an excellent day. Hundreds of schoolchildren came through the doors of the Parliament and it was a wonderful exercise for the committee and for the Parliament. I was very pleased with the outcome of the day. I thank all the members who were involved for the time that they gave to the exercise. I also thank the members who came along to the members' debate later in the day, which also went well.

The Scottish Parliament information centre has offered to provide a more detailed paper with analysis of what the children said. It would be useful to take that offer up. A brief analysis of what was said is included in the committee papers today. It was interesting to find out some of the issues that the children thought were important, including cleaner beaches, which is very interesting. We received a reply from a youngster from Airdrie on what Europe means to her, which we have circulated today. It is a thoughtful piece and I would welcome the opportunity to write to her on behalf of the committee to thank her for making that contribution and for taking the time to send her views to the committee.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I will pick up on one of the imaginative suggestions that were made. It was suggested that there should be joint school trips on which schools from different countries go together to another different country. Is there any way of progressing that innovative and clever idea?

**The Convener:** I know that in my area—North Ayrshire—a number of schools have such links. One of the secondary schools is linked with a region in Finland and an art school in Pisa. It is amazing how that has encouraged children to develop the curriculum. It is an ordinary secondary school in what could perhaps be described as a deprived area, but children from it can go to an art school in Pisa with children from Helsinki. That has been a tremendous project.

There are many examples of good practice. I wonder whether there is any way in which we could promote such understanding and learning. The committee has a heavy agenda over the next year. I do not know whether it would be possible to invite in a couple of authorities that do such work well, in order to help us promote such projects throughout Scotland. If an area fosters such links, it tends to do so across the board. Primary and secondary schools are involved in my area and there is a full programme of exchanges with other regions in Europe. The exchanges encompass the arts, language and music. Children from my area

performed an opera with children from Helsinki. Such projects involve a range of activities, over and above language skills. Those projects are a good way to introduce children to other cultures and to develop their interest in them. Perhaps the clerks could consider the matter.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** Could we look for opportunities to extend the excellent work that is done for Scottish schools by the education unit in our Parliament to include youngsters from other parts of the European Union or elsewhere? At this time of year, a lot of kids and school groups are on visits to Scotland. If one could make prior contact with the people who are organising such trips, and get groups of kids from other parts of the European Union who happen to be in Edinburgh to spend an hour in the education unit and perhaps arrange for a Scottish school to be there at the same time, that could be mutually useful and could help to establish contacts.

**The Convener:** That is a good idea. I was impressed with the workshops that were organised for the children. It would be great to extend that to children from other countries. I do not know what resources the education unit has, but we should consider that idea and try to promote it if possible. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## EC/EU Legislation (Implementation)

**The Convener:** Item 3 is on implementation of EC/EU legislation. We have received a response from the Executive in reply to the concerns that we expressed in an earlier report. We now have information about the state of play on the implementation of European legislation in Scotland.

The clerk and our legal adviser have raised a number of further points for clarification in the briefing paper. Are colleagues happy to proceed on the basis that is recommended in the paper that has been circulated?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

15:15

**Ben Wallace:** The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is interesting that there are some pretty direct responses from the Executive saying that there appear to have been mistakes throughout. That just illustrates the under-resourcing in the Scottish Executive and the Scotland Office of monitoring and understanding the implementation of directives post-devolution. When the responses come back to the committee and the clerk and legal advisers get their hands on them, they do not usually hold up to much scrutiny. That shows that the Executive is perhaps struggling to cope with monitoring the situation. It was an honest response to say that mistakes have been made, but there are too many mistakes, and that must be pointed out.

**The Convener:** I welcome the fact that the Executive gave an honest response to the points that we raised. I think that that justifies the approach that the committee has taken this year of entering into detailed scrutiny. As well as pointing out some matters that the Executive needs to consider, the committee has done a good job of developing a power of scrutiny in relation to those items.

## Sift

**The Convener:** I ask members to note the paper. As you know, we forward the sift paper to the other committees and they decide which are the most appropriate documents for them to examine. Do members agree to note the paper at this stage?

**Ben Wallace:** When we send the paper off to other committees, do we get any feedback from them other than that they have received it?

**The Convener:** You might recall that we used to scrutinise the European documents according to a priority routine. We changed the way in which we do that and gave those powers back to the committees. One of the reasons why we did that was that we were not getting much feedback, and the effort that the clerks were putting into categorising the documents according to the various levels of scrutiny that are required was labour-intensive. We therefore decided to adopt a new way of doing things.

That said, I mentioned at the conveners liaison group a few weeks ago that some of the documents are important to the committees and that I thought it appropriate that committees take a bit more time to consider them. I said that the committee was not getting feedback from the other committees about how important or relevant they found the information that we were passing on to them. At that meeting, a couple of conveners said that they did take time to review the information that we send and that, on a number of occasions, their committees had gone into some detail on papers and reports that we had forwarded to them.

It is also worth pointing out that the Transport and the Environment Committee held an away day on Europe and how it affects that committee's business. Progress is being made. Inevitably, there was a period at the beginning of the Parliament when all committees were still finding their feet, and primary legislation was and is a priority. However, as the committees begin to work together more, there are more opportunities for them to do a little bit more scrutiny.

**Sarah Boyack:** I agree. Three meetings ago, I suggested that we tag one or two documents, particularly those on European railway development.

**The Convener:** Yes, I recall that.

**Sarah Boyack:** As you know, the Transport and the Environment Committee is doing a report on railways. It would, in order to add to the information on what is being considered, be useful for this committee to get feedback from other committees, in particular when they have a good

story to tell about taking time to examine major work that has come from Europe. When the committee visited Europe, we said that we needed to engage much earlier. It seems to me that the sift is the early stage; given that we have a handle on some of the big issues that are coming through, now is a good time for us to be doing it.

The report to the Transport and the Environment Committee refers to a new directive on the energy performance of buildings, which was upgraded in March. Issues come through all the time that affect the Parliament's legislative programme.

**The Convener:** It is important that we encourage the other committees; that was the reason for the meeting with the other conveners. Stephen Imrie tells me that the reports that we flagged up as a result of Sarah Boyack's suggestion a few weeks ago were taken into account and have been pointed out to the Transport and the Environment Committee, which has read them as part of its rail inquiry. Perhaps we do not always get feedback, but the other committees are increasingly engaging with Europe. They acknowledge and understand how important Europe is to the everyday work of the Parliament.

Aileen McLeod of the Scottish Parliament information centre has liaised with other committees. She has worked with the justice committees and with the Transport and the Environment Committee. We are gradually making inroads, but I agree with colleagues that it is important to keep up the pressure.

**Ben Wallace:** I speak to my colleagues in the House of Commons about similar issues and they are informed of the consequences of proposed directives, having won the argument for that about a year and a half or two years ago. Her Majesty's Government would state the consequences of directives coming into the UK, although it would not necessarily give details. Government documents would, for example, state that a draft council directive would lead to a statutory instrument to amend a medical act. We can see clearly from the Government's planned course of action whether a matter is devolved, whether it is relevant and whether it is a priority. The Cabinet Office, through the Scottish Executive, provides us with details of proposed directives, but it does not tell us what it intends to do as a result.

**The Convener:** Perhaps our earlier item on legislative scrutiny dealt with that.

**Stephen Imrie:** I will examine the matter for Ben Wallace. Scottish statutory instruments appear with a cover sheet that includes a variety of information, which lead committees and the Subordinate Legislation Committee receive. I will examine whether the sheet covers the information that Ben Wallace mentioned.

At the tail end of the paper on implementation of EC and EU legislation, there is a transposition note. I know that Ben Wallace has been particularly interested in that. The Executive now provides the notes more regularly and formally. The notes explain the nature of the directive in question, its objectives and how those will be transposed into a statutory instrument; that is, how that will be carried out. I will examine the matter further if the committee agrees.

**The Convener:** Does the committee agree to that?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Convener's Report

**The Convener:** Item 5 on the agenda is the convener's report.

Annexe A of document EU/02/8/5 contains an extract from a letter from the European Commission on the reform of the common fisheries policy and the Hague preferences. I suggest that we thank the Commission for its response and note the content of the letter. John Home Robertson is an expert on fishing matters. Is he happy with the Commission's response?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I would not go so far as to say either that I am an expert on fishing matters or that I am happy with the Commission's response. Annexe A of the document seems to indicate that the Hague preferences will be placed on a firmer legal basis. I fear that that step may be used as an opportunity to water down the rights that have been established for the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, which brought many fishing waters into the European Union on their accession.

The Hague preferences are an important safeguard, of Scottish interests in particular. I have no doubt that the Executive will observe developments carefully. In doing so, it should have the full support of the Parliament and of the European Committee. It is worrying that there are moves afoot to alter the current arrangements, particularly in the context of other developments under the Spanish presidency, such as the departure of Steffen Smidt. Steffen Smidt is an assiduous, knowledgeable and fair official who has worked hard for fisheries conservation in the European Union. The loss of an official of that quality is rather disturbing.

**The Convener:** At the end of June, we will take evidence from the Danish ambassador on the forthcoming Danish presidency. At that meeting, members will have an opportunity to raise some of the issues that John Home Robertson has highlighted. The next time that a member of the committee is in Brussels, they may want to meet the Commission to support the Executive's stance on the Hague preferences.

**Ben Wallace:** The moves that have been taken and the departure of Steffen Smidt threaten Scotland's interests and are not in keeping with the rules. Given that we have carried out an inquiry into the common fisheries policy, we may be able to exert more pressure and make it clear that the Hague preferences need to be sorted out. A decision on the matter should not be delayed until the Greek presidency begins in 2003. The things that are being done to sort out the common fisheries policy are quite wrong. Perhaps we should speak to the UK and Scottish ministers with

responsibility for fisheries to reinforce that message.

**The Convener:** We are pushing at an open door with the Scottish Executive.

**Mr Home Robertson:** That is no bad thing. The Scottish Executive takes a firm position on the issue. It would help the minister responsible, Ross Finnie, to know that he has the active, cross-party support of the European Committee and of the Parliament as a whole, as he will have difficulties negotiating on the issue. As I discovered when I held the fisheries portfolio a couple of years ago, various mainland European countries are taking concerted steps to do away with the Hague preferences. We, along with the Irish, are isolated. We will have to work hard to protect our interests.

**The Convener:** Should we write back to the Commission, expressing our concern, and send our response to Ross Finnie, along with a letter of support?

**Ben Wallace:** I am not sure whether the Commission is the body to which we need to respond. Perhaps we should express our concerns to the ministers responsible for fisheries at both UK and Scottish levels, as they will be part of the team that negotiates on the issue. We should give them our support and underline the importance of the Hague preferences. The Commission will be merely the referee in the negotiations.

**Mr Home Robertson:** The problem is that someone appears to be in the process of nobbling the referee.

**Ben Wallace:** He is not just being nobbled—he has gone.

**Mr Home Robertson:** The departure of Steffen Smidt and the circumstances in which that happened are worrying. We should take a proactive line and indicate our support for the position of the Scottish Executive and the UK Government. However, it would do no harm to flag up our alarm about what is happening in the Commission.

**The Convener:** We are saying that we will cover all bases—the Scottish Executive, the UK minister with responsibility for fisheries and the European Commission. We will also take up the matter with the Danish presidency when we hear from the ambassador at the end of June.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Should we request information from our MEPs and ask them to update us on what is happening?

**The Convener:** I know that Catherine Stihler is a rapporteur on fishing matters.

**Ben Wallace:** Struan Stevenson is chair of the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries.



**Nora Radcliffe:** Can we write to the Committee on Fisheries and ask for its views?

**The Convener:** That is a good idea. We will do that.

The next item to report on is the Assembly of European Regions conference in Madrid. I delegated that to John Home Robertson, who attended on our behalf. I believe that he will give us an update on that just now and that the clerk will produce a paper on it at a later date.

15:30

**Mr Home Robertson:** I think that you made the right choice when you decided to go to the Committee of the Regions rather than the Assembly of European Regions because I have the impression that the Committee of the Regions is superseding or has superseded the AER.

At the invitation of the Assembly of European Regions, I went to the conference, accompanied by Stephen Imrie, as an observer. There was an interesting and well-organised debate on the governance issue, but there was an oddly random selection of representatives of regions, small local authorities and even municipalities from Europe and from accession states. Surprisingly, there were also representatives from Norway and Switzerland, which do not think of themselves as accession states at the moment.

It was an interesting gathering, but I do not have the impression that the AER is going far. It was clear that there are diverging interests between the larger regions such as Wallonia and Catalonia and some of the other regions. As we know, there are moves towards forming an association of regions that have legislative powers. From our point of view, that might be a more useful and appropriate body than the AER. Depending on how the situation evolves, it might be appropriate for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities or major local authorities to engage with the AER, but I do not think that it is an appropriate body for us to be involved in.

Stephen Imrie will circulate some notes on the subject but the only important point is that the chairman, Dr Christoph Palmer, from Baden-Württemberg, which is one of the major German Länder, was keen that we be engaged and I have the impression that the major German Länder would be interested in establishing direct contacts with us and the Scottish Executive. We should take that forward.

**The Convener:** Thanks. It is useful to hear about the direction in which the AER is going or is not going. I am not sure whether COSLA is a member already, but I know that some bodies in Scotland are or have been—for example, the West of Scotland European Consortium used to be a

member. I know that the organisation has experienced difficulties in recent years so perhaps this is not the time for people to think about joining. We will await the paper from the clerk and further information.

The next item to note is the transcript of our recent videoconference with the Flemish and Catalan Parliaments, which was quite successful despite one or two technical difficulties. I did not take part in the previous videoconference, which was with representatives from Galicia, but I understand that there was no substantially verbatim transcript, so the fact that we have one for this videoconference is a positive development. I understand that the clerks are trying to arrange the face-to-face meeting that we discussed during the videoconference for the autumn. That will be a further positive step towards establishing more effective links with European regions.

I suggest that we also do some work on the idea that was raised during the videoconference and in our paper on the future of Europe of creating a network of European committees. There is a great deal of interest in that, especially among regional ministers to whom I have spoken. It would be useful to have a short paper that we could use to influence the work of the convention on the future of Europe. I might say something about that when I talk about the Committee of the Regions later. Are members content to note the paper that the clerks have produced on the videoconference?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I thought that the videoconference was a good idea, but I am not sure that a three-way videoconference involving three different translations worked terribly well. The members who took part gave us a series of statements, but the event did not develop into a dialogue as such. A videoconference involving two groups of people, rather than three, might make more sense.

**The Convener:** One of the difficulties was that Catalonia was dependent on our interpreter in Scotland to hear what was happening. Brussels was also dependent on her for interpretation back into English. The process took up a lot of time and meant that the event was not as productive as it could have been.

There are ways in which such videoconferences could be improved in future. That said, the principle is good. We need to provide simultaneous interpretation for everyone in each of the videoconference locations rather than have it delivered through the cameras, as that slowed things down. Apart from that, I think that the event went okay, but the point that John Home Robertson made is valid.

**Sarah Boyack:** I want to make the same points. It was difficult to get a conversation going when

everything had to be translated. I compared the event with the visit that was made by the Basque committee for agriculture and fishing. We were able to have a better discussion during that visit and that was rewarding. The videoconference link-up felt faceless. People were far away and there was a time lag in the discussions. Another method of holding such events would be to have bilateral discussions with each group.

If simultaneous translation is not available, the event is made much harder for everybody involved. Even with simultaneous translation, it is hard to develop a relationship with people who are remote. The convener knew the committee chairs, but trying to take part in such a dialogue can be frustrating if you are not sure to whom you are talking. Members are given a list of names and have to try to work out which parties the people represent. It is not possible to get a sense of the dynamics of the other groups. I was involved in a discussion about governance, but it was hard to get under the skin of the debate.

Videoconferencing sends out all the right political messages—it is the right kind of thing to be doing. I am trying to think how we could get the benefit of such links without the hassle. The people who organised the event must have been tearing their hair out, as it was impossible to know when things were going to work. It was great that we tried to do it and, politically, it was good to send out the message that the constitutional regions are talking to each other. We need to think about how we organise other such events in future. The people in the background need to make lot of effort to set up what is a very short engagement.

**The Convener:** I agree with Sarah Boyack. There were problems with some of the practicalities. If I had not known the committee chairs, the event would have been even more difficult. I was in the fortunate position of knowing them and that helped enormously. I understand members' problem of feeling that they were talking to people who were remote and faceless. That can happen in such link-ups when interpretation is involved.

I have been involved in link-ups with schools. The time delay makes it difficult to engage in the same way as is possible in a face-to-face exchange. I hope that we will have a face-to-face exchange in the autumn, as future video links will be made that little bit easier when we know the people with whom we are talking.

The European affairs committees in the Flemish and Catalan Parliaments also felt that the link-up was important politically. They appreciated the step that we took to take the partnership a little bit further forward. In that respect, the event was a good exercise in linking up our committee with their committees.

**Nora Radcliffe:** The event seemed to be a set piece rather than a debate. People seemed to want to make statements but not to answer questions. Perhaps we were too ambitious in thinking that we would get a debate at the first attempt; perhaps it was inevitable that the opening salvos would be formal statements with no discussion.

**Ben Wallace:** Welcome to the world of European forum debates—they are all like that.

**Nora Radcliffe:** They do not go on to the next stage.

**Mr Home Robertson:** Our politicians are never like that.

**Ben Wallace:** They do not interrupt and they do not give way to people. If you go and watch the convention on the future of Europe you will see eight hours of that.

**The Convener:** This has been a useful discussion and I am sure that we have all learned lessons from the videoconference that will help us to do the next one better.

Nora's point brings me on neatly to the next item to report on—the Committee of the Regions. I will be brief because I know that John Home Robertson has to go to the Holyrood project meeting and that others have commitments too. I have a meeting at 4 o'clock.

I want to bring two important things to members' attention. Discussions have been held about the convention in the full Committee of the Regions and at what might be called its periphery. The vice-president of the Committee of the Regions is Eduardo Zaplana. He is leading the discussions and is producing working documents from the full committee's perspective. The commission on governance is also producing a number of reports to be fed into the Committee of the Regions. I have brought back the working document that Mr Zaplana produced on Thursday last week. I received the translation into English only on Friday—I did not have it on Thursday when we were discussing it. I have given it to the clerks for circulation. It is a first draft of how Mr Zaplana sees the input of the Committee of the Regions to the convention.

A number of us felt that the document had been drafted in isolation; we made the point that it had appeared from nowhere. As a result, the Committee of the Regions issued a press release on Friday, asking local authorities and regional representatives across Europe to contribute to a forum on the web. The COR will collate the responses and draft a paper—perhaps to be incorporated as an annexe, although I am not sure. We are all being asked to take part in the forum. I feel that the European Committee should

use the information that we gathered for our governance report to produce a summary of our key views on the future of Europe, which we could then contribute to the debate. We could task our clerks with putting that on the web.

I am not sure about the time scales. If there were time for a draft to be brought to the next committee, that would be useful; if there were not, we have already agreed our governance report and we could make a summary of it. It is important that we contribute in some way. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** The second thing on which I want to report from the Committee of the Regions is the competition for European region of the year. The closing date for entries to the competition for 2004 is September of this year. The submission has to be from the head of the region—be it the President, Prime Minister or First Minister. It would be useful if we made a submission from Scotland. The competition is about how the regions have promoted Europe and I feel that, in setting up the Scottish Parliament and the European Committee, we have promoted Europe a good deal. Through dialogue, we have tried to increase Scottish people's knowledge of European matters.

We could make a good case for Scotland's being European region of the year. With the committee's consent, I would like to forward the papers to the First Minister's office with a recommendation from the committee that we participate in the process and with the suggestion that the committee would be happy to provide information about the way in which we have tried to promote Europe. That could form part of the submission. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Ben Wallace:** I am not sure that the Scottish National Party would be keen for Scotland to be portrayed as a region.

**Sarah Boyack:** Is that a surprise?

**Ben Wallace:** Get rid of the SNP—that is what I say.

**Nora Radcliffe:** If SNP members were here, they could say that. They are not, so it is tough.

**Ben Wallace:** They can go away. They are not here.

**The Convener:** Let us turn to our final item. The clerks have listed for our interest the forthcoming Council of the EU and European Council meetings. The clerks have met officials in the Scottish Executive and we now have agreement that we can start on the first set of agendas and briefings for the next meeting. From then on, we will be able to undertake pre and post-Council scrutiny. That is a useful step forward. It has taken

a lot of work to get there, but it will be a positive development in the committee's scrutiny of the Scottish Executive.

15:45

**Nora Radcliffe:** Will we pass the documents on to the appropriate subject committees?

**The Convener:** Not at this point. I think that they are on the web. At the moment, we have a list of the meeting dates. By the next committee meeting, we will have received information from the Executive about the key issues. Once we know the key issues, we will be able to engage with the subject committees.

**Ben Wallace:** I am glad that we are getting the information. It has taken a long time. It is a tribute to the committee that we will now receive it. I do not think that the Executive was very keen to provide it.

I note that it is intended to have the agendas by the next committee meeting. I suppose that they are the last thing to be received. A meeting of the internal market, consumer affairs and tourism council was scheduled for today and I hoped that we would get the agenda. However, we are keeping an eye on the situation. It would be nice to have the agendas to complete the picture.

Looking down the list of meetings, I can see what is relevant. There must be times when the internal market, consumer affairs and tourism council is relevant to Scotland, as we have a minister with responsibility for tourism. There is an education and youth affairs council on 30 May and a fisheries council on 11 June. Those areas are relevant to us, and I look forward to receiving the agendas for the meetings. Will we get the agenda for the fisheries council before 11 June? Our next meeting will be on 18 June.

**The Convener:** Our next meeting is on 18 June.

**Ben Wallace:** I hope that the agenda will be forwarded to us before our meeting. Is that fair enough?

**The Convener:** I would be happy for the information to be circulated to members as soon as we get it.

I am interested in the employment and social affairs council meeting on 3 June, as the European Commission's implementation of the action plan on skills and mobility will be discussed at that meeting. That will be relevant to our employment inquiry.

The first meeting at which we discuss the Council meetings—which will be our next meeting—will be a bit of a learning curve, but I am convinced that the work will be useful not only to this committee, but to other committees of the Parliament.

**Sarah Boyack:** The meetings on the list run from 13 May to the end of June. Every fortnight, we will have to consider which issues we take because we cannot take them all in a one. Some of the meetings have already been held. By the time of our next meeting, half of them will have been held and we will be receiving the agendas for the meetings at the end of June. We do not have a lot of time in which to respond. It is for the clerks to judge how we get the information. If the information comes in a one, like this, it will be interesting for us to consider the meetings at the end of the list. The information about the meetings at the beginning of the list will tell us what has been discussed.

I presume that we are partly in the hands of the Executive with regard to how and when we receive the information. Nonetheless, we should have the chance to consider it when it arrives, so that we can start to highlight issues. I know from experience of environment and transport councils that an issue might be on the agenda for two years. The topic will not be new, but we must know when it will be discussed so that we can submit our views when that will be critical.

**The Convener:** That is why it is important that the committee gets the briefing note that the Executive has agreed to provide. That will flag up matters that are of particular importance to Scotland. We will have to use that to prioritise the meetings. In any one meeting, there may not be a great deal that is particularly of relevance to Scotland. We will be a little dependent on the briefings, so it is important that we get them as soon as possible. Does Stephen Imrie want to comment?

**Stephen Imrie:** I will add a small point. I have had productive meetings with officials in the Executive in the past few days. They are well aware of the committee's views and have taken them on board. I will be working hard alongside them to get the information in the form that the committee wants it as early as possible. As soon as I have the information, I will circulate it to the committee rather than wait until two or three days in advance of the committee meeting, when members traditionally receive their papers. Members could have the information in advance of their normal committee papers. Executive officials are more than aware of the committee's wishes. I am sure that they will do their best to deliver.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

That is all that I have to report on today. Before I conclude the meeting, I ask members to note several things. Our next meeting is on Tuesday 18 June, because 4 June is a public holiday. We have agreed that we will discuss a number of matters at that meeting. Those include pre and post-Council scrutiny and the first draft of the structural funds

reform policy paper. I note that the terms of reference for the report that Ben Wallace and Helen Eadie will do jointly will be available at the next meeting. We look forward to seeing that.

A number of meetings are coming up. Some of them have yet to be confirmed, but I understand that Commissioner Patten is looking to come to the Parliament on 25 June. We will keep members informed of that. Sir Stephen Wall is also looking to come on that day and the Danish ambassador will speak to us on 26 June. We will keep the committee posted, but it would be helpful if members could pencil those dates into their diary.

I thank colleagues and members of the public for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 15:51.*

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**Tuesday 4 June 2002**

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