

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 19 November 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 19 November 2002

Col.

ITEM IN PRIVATE.....	1725
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE (SCRUTINY)	1726
CONVENER'S REPORT	1729
SIFT	1731

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

14th 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)

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 19 November 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

The Convener (Irene Oldfather): I welcome members to the 14th meeting in 2002 of the European Committee. I have apologies from Ben Wallace and I understand that Nora Radcliffe will be a bit late.

Item in Private

The Convener: Do members agree to take in private item 5, on our report on the future of Europe? Taking such an item in private is normal practice. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Executive (Scrutiny)

The Convener: Item 2 is our pre and post-meeting scrutiny of the European Council. The recommendations are on page 3 of the briefing paper.

On the economic and financial affairs council, the recommendation is to note the agenda but to ask to be kept informed of developments in relation to the employment package. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: On the competitiveness council, the recommendation is to note the agenda. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The paper for the transport, telecommunications and energy council was tabled this morning. I have not had a chance to look at it, but it is only an agenda so, if colleagues are agreeable, we will simply note it. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: On the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council, the recommendation is that we note the agenda, welcome the details and ask to be kept informed of developments in relation to the employment package and corporate social responsibility. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: On the agriculture and fisheries council, the recommendation is to note that the fisheries part arrived this morning, which is a little late. On the agricultural component of the agenda, members might wish to ask the Executive to keep them informed of progress on the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy. I know that the Rural Development Committee is interested in that. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: A significant amount of detail was provided on the justice and home affairs council. The recommendation is that we note that. Is that agreed?

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I have a question about the agreement between Europol and the United States of America that is mentioned on page 20. At the bottom of the paragraph it says:

"There is no impact on UK law or Scotland's law enforcement."

What effect does the agreement have on Scots law as opposed to on Scotland's law enforcement? Major issues on the exchange of information led to 14 Scottish citizens being turned back at Florence only the other week. I have asked the minister about the matter and his statements claim that we do not exchange information. Having spoken to colleagues in Europe, I am led to believe that the United States provided the information that was used to prevent our citizens from travelling within Italy. I want to know whether there is an impact on Scots law, not on Scots law enforcement.

The Convener: We can seek clarification on that point and report back to the committee.

As there are no other points from members, we move on to scrutiny of the reports on the post-council meetings. On the ECOFIN council, we are asked to note the report and ask to be kept informed of developments in relation to corporate governance. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Finally, on the education and culture council, it is recommended that we note the information and welcome the detail provided. I note that page 31 mentions the review of the European year of languages 2001 and the fact that, in mid-2003, there will be consultation on

"the contents of an action plan to promote linguistic diversity and language learning."

The committee and the Parliament might be interested in that. Perhaps we could ask for further information.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): On the general agreement on trade in services, or GATS, I welcome the general concern to treat primary and secondary education as a public good. Back benchers have also debated the position of tertiary education. I want to flag up to the Executive the fact that, on a couple of occasions, the committee has come across the question of what GATS means in practice.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Last night, I was talking to students at a meeting at the University of Edinburgh. Before that, I had obtained a copy of the Department of Trade and Industry report, to which the committee has referred before. That report says that there is now a deadline for the consultation process—3 January—so the Parliament's committees have no time to lose in making their views known, particularly with regard to the tertiary education sector. As well as that, a petition about health and community care has been referred to the Health and Community Care Committee. I urge everyone to make a big effort and to welcome a document given to me by the clerks to the committee. The

paper says that the Assembly of European Regions has taken a strong position on GATS. I hope that the Parliament will support that view.

The Convener: When I was on the Health and Community Care Committee, I recall that there was active interest in relevant developments.

Helen Eadie: John McAllion was charged with being a reporter on the issue on behalf of the committee. His report was to be deferred until the DTI report came out. Now that the DTI report has come out, we must chase up John McAllion's report.

The Convener: I point out a typographical error on page 15, just in case we are being tested to ensure that we read through the documents in detail. On page 15, item 15 is entitled "Tobacco". The conclusion of paragraph a) reads:

"This is a devolved issue with no particular Scottish dimension."

I feel sure that that is a typographical mistake.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): The matter has a Scottish dimension, does it not? Scotland has the most appalling health record and we should be updated on the situation. The Scottish interest in health is probably greater than the interest anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Helen Eadie: Convener, I recall that you have spoken about tobacco in Parliament on more than one occasion. You have highlighted how many billions of pounds—

The Convener: Absolutely. Billions of pounds are spent on tobacco subsidies.

Helen Eadie: The topic is relevant. I am sure that many of the people who are waiting for flood money would be glad to know that money was being spent on flood compensation rather than on subsidising tobacco.

The Convener: I am sure that there is a mistake in the document, so I thought that we should note it.

Mr Home Robertson: The point is that the issue is reserved, is it not?

Convener's Report

The Convener: Item 3 is the convener's report. Following the meeting with our colleagues in Flanders and Catalonia, committee members want me to thank the clerks for all the effort that went into the two days. Members who were able to attend the meeting and the lunch will agree that they were useful. In particular, I was pleased that we formally established the network and also that we agreed its future steps.

In the immediate term, we will consider the possibility of a joint agreement and position paper on the future of Europe. Members will recall that the draft agreement mentions a timetable of January 2003. In the longer term, we would like to share good practice on parliamentary procedures and so on. It was agreed that once we have deepened our relationship, we will include other regions of the European Union. We have taken a positive initiative and we welcome the support of our colleagues in Flanders and Catalonia.

Do other members wish to comment?

Helen Eadie: It was regrettable that the media did not pick up on the meeting. It was such an historic occasion, but there was no coverage from Scotland's media, despite the best efforts of the convener and the clerks. The clerks deserve commendation for all their work. The meeting represents a major step forward, but I share your frustrations about the media.

The Convener: The next item is to note the monthly report by the chief executive and the external liaison unit. Is that agreed?

Sarah Boyack: It would be helpful if acronyms were not used in reports. It is fine if one knows what they mean, but not if one does not.

The Convener: I will ask the clerks to chase that up with the chief executive.

Sarah Boyack: Might the clerks make particular reference to the BIIPB? The chief executive might know what that means.

The Convener: We will request that future reports record the full title of any groups or organisations.

Mr Home Robertson: I think that BIIPB stands for British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

Sarah Boyack: It could be.

Mr Home Robertson: However, it might mean something else altogether.

The Convener: Okay, in future, we will ensure that full titles are used.

The next item is a request to attend a conference on the future of Europe, organised by the central local partnership and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Members will recall that we raised the question at a previous committee meeting, at which point we had not been invited. Now we have been invited. The conference is on 28 November. I understand that there are difficulties with travel on that day, including possible strikes at airports. If the committee agrees, I will attend the conference on behalf of the committee, subject to being able to make suitable travel arrangements. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Sift

The Convener: We come to the sift of EC and EU documents. We are asked to note the report. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting. I thank members for their attendance. The meeting has been short today.

14:15

Meeting continued in private until 15:35.

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