



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 7 September 2010

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

10th Meeting 2010, Session 3

CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

*Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

Simon Watkins

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 7 September 2010

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:30*]

Interests

The Convener (Irene Oldfather): Good morning, colleagues. Welcome to the 10th meeting in 2010 of the European and External Relations Committee. I have received apologies from Patricia Ferguson and Bill Wilson.

Item 1 is a declaration of interests. I welcome Frank McAveety to the committee and ask him whether he has any relevant interests to declare.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I do not think that I have any relevant interests relating to the committee's work, but I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The Convener: Thank you. I take this opportunity on behalf of the committee to thank both Michael Matheson and Rhona Brankin for the work that they contributed to the committee over the past session. I know that all members would like to record their appreciation for that valuable work.

Deputy Convener

10:31

The Convener: Item 2 is to choose our deputy convener. Parliament has agreed that members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination. That being the case, I seek a nomination for the position.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I nominate Sandra White.

The Convener: Are there any other nominations?

Jamie Hepburn: Are you trying to make me feel bad? [*Laughter.*]

Sandra White was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Congratulations, Sandra. I look forward to working with you on the committee.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:31

The Convener: Item 3 is a decision on taking business in private. We have a number of papers to agree on the committee's forward work programme. Do members agree to take items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

“Brussels Bulletin”

10:32

The Convener: Ian Duncan is not with us today.

Simon Watkins (Clerk): He is at the Justice Committee at the moment.

The Convener: This week's “Brussels Bulletin” is interesting. I immediately thought, before I said anything, that Ted Brocklebank would have some comments to make. Do colleagues have any queries, or is there anything that they would like to draw to our attention?

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I have no query, but I declare a rural interest.

I note that the European Parliament has accepted George Lyon's recommendations on the common agricultural policy, with many amendments.

The Convener: George Lyon is one of the members of the European Parliament with whom we hope to set up a videoconference link or whom we will invite to appear before the committee. I am sure that that will provide us with an opportunity to find out a bit more about how matters are progressing.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I am interested in the European citizens initiative—an issue that I have raised on numerous occasions in the context of the Lisbon treaty. It would be interesting if Ian Duncan could keep us updated on that. There is no controversy about it, but decisions need to be made about exactly how many signatures and member states are required.

The Convener: Ian Duncan is keeping a watching brief on the issue. We will ask him to continue to report to the committee.

Would Ted Brocklebank like to highlight the mackerel situation, by any chance?

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yes. It would have been, and will be, useful to get Ian Duncan's take on the politics of the issue. Given that Iceland is pitching for full European Union membership, it seems odd that it should ratchet up problems by unilaterally declaring that it will fish out as many pelagic fish as it wishes in its waters, following on from earlier action by the Faroe Islands. I wonder what is going on. I suspect that it is a negotiating tactic, but Ian Duncan could probably bring us up to speed on the issue.

That certainly creates a lot of potential problems for our mackerel fishermen here in Scotland. The mackerel fishery is very successful and has succeeded in managing its business effectively for

many years, but the whole thing could be plunged into chaos if Iceland and the Faroes are allowed to get away with what they are doing and to go on their own.

The Convener: When I read this section of the bulletin, it occurred to me that the Belgian ambassador will attend our next committee meeting. Given that Belgium currently holds the presidency, that may present us with an opportunity, as Belgium will be crucial to the negotiations on Iceland that are taking place at the moment. We could raise the issue with the ambassador at our next meeting, as well as keeping a watching brief on it.

Simon Watkins: We expect the ambassador to be accompanied by a representative of the Flanders Government, which is taking the lead on fishing policy, so someone who can answer questions on the issue will be here.

The Convener: I draw members' attention to page 6 of the bulletin, which discusses the innovation strategy. I notice that the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science

"has announced a fund of €6.4 billion for investment in research and development to be spent by the end of 2011".

That is a very short timescale within which to spend that kind of money. I wonder whether Scotland is in the frame for any of it. Do members agree that we should write to the Minister for Culture and External Affairs to ask whether any publicity is being given to the initiative or any partnership is under way with companies that might be able to benefit from it?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Sandra White: I had marked the issue and am glad that you have raised it. Like you, I was going to suggest that we write to the minister to ask whether only the United Kingdom can take matters forward or whether individual countries in the UK, such as Scotland, can do so. As you said, we must keep an eye on the issue and encourage the Government to advertise the initiative or to speak to industries.

Mr McAveety: I refer members to the section on other news on page 6 of the bulletin, which mentions the invitation to tender for research into the sport sector's economic role. My experience is that there is a real dearth of research into sports issues generally. It would be useful for us to track the initiative and to look into the issues to which it relates, given that the Lisbon treaty addresses issues relating to sport.

The Convener: Absolutely. We should write to the Government on the item to see how it is promoting tenders from within Scotland.

Sandra White: Page 7 of the bulletin refers to money that has been left over from the European energy programme for recovery. A report proposing that the money be reallocated to renewable energy projects in urban areas will be discussed in October 2010. I suggest that we draw the minister's attention to that proposal.

The Convener: The committee is happy to agree to that. We note the contents of the bulletin and refer it to the appropriate subject committees.

That brings the public part of our meeting to a close.

10:37

Meeting continued in private until 11:40.

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