



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 June 2011

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2011, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

*Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 14 June 2011

[Helen Eadie opened the meeting at 14:03]

Interests

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Good afternoon. I am pleased to see a number of members of the public in the gallery. I do not know whether this is a pleasure for them to look forward to, but we are pleased to welcome them here this afternoon.

As I am the most senior—some might say the oldest—committee member, under standing orders I have the pleasure, privilege and honour of chairing the meeting until I have completed two tasks. I welcome my colleagues around the table and everyone else in the room, including the clerks, to the first meeting of the European and External Relations Committee in the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament. I remind everyone present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off completely as they interfere with the sound system, even when they are switched to silent. Apologies have been received today from Jamie McGrigor—I think that his is the only apology.

Agenda item 1 is the declaration of interests. In accordance with section 3 of the “Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament”, I invite members to declare any interests relevant to the remit of the committee, and I remind members that any declaration should be brief but sufficiently detailed to make clear to any listener the nature of the interests.

I have submitted interests in two key areas to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee clerks. I have no registrable interests in the categories of remuneration and related undertakings, gifts, and overseas visits, but I have declared interests in heritable property and a further interest in the voluntary category. *[Interruption.]* I welcome Jamie McGrigor and withdraw his apologies for the meeting. I say to him that I have just opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. We are now going round the table to declare interests.

As I said, I have submitted a voluntary declaration of property interests. Subsequent to my original declaration, I have also written to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee clerks to declare that I am a member of

the Co-operative Party, the Fabian Society and the GMB union.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To my knowledge, I have no registrable interests that would have an impact on the committee. I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, as published on the Parliament’s website.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, have no registrable interests that I foresee as being relevant to the committee’s remit. I refer members and other interested people to my entry in the register of interests. I will probably preface my remarks in every committee that I am on and every debate in which I participate by saying that I am a member of the Law Society of Scotland and that I hold a current practising certificate. That has no particular relevance to the committee that I can foresee, but I should declare it.

Helen Eadie: I remind members that the register of interests will not be published until 8 July, so I ask them to elaborate slightly on their interests for the record.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I have no registrable interests. However, given the committee’s remit, I point out that I have voluntarily declared that I am a member of the global council of parliamentarians for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, which extends across more than 70 Parliaments around the world, so that might at some point prove to be a relevant interest to the committee.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I have only one interest to declare, which is that, as a local councillor in Glasgow, I receive annual remuneration of £16,234. I have no other registrable interests to declare.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have no registrable interests other than those that are already in my entry in the register.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I have no registrable interests that are relevant to the committee. I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, which will be published in July, but I have no registrable interests at all.

Convener

14:08

Helen Eadie: Item 2 is our choosing the convener. The Parliament has agreed that only Scottish National Party members are eligible to be convener of the committee. I seek a nomination for the position.

Aileen McLeod: I nominate Christina McKelvie.

Jamie McGrigor: I am happy to second that.

Helen Eadie: There are no other nominations.

Christina McKelvie was chosen as convener.

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): I say a sincere thank you to my committee colleagues for choosing me as your convener. I am delighted to undertake the role. The committee has a great input into where we go—it is about Scotland's place in the world. I hope that, with the knowledge, experience, skills and commitment to the issues that we all have, we can take the committee forward. I greatly look forward to working with members.

Deputy Convener

14:10

The Convener: Item 3 is the selection of the deputy convener. The procedure is much the same as the one that we have just gone through. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible to be deputy convener of the committee. I invite nominations for the position.

Helen Eadie: I nominate Hanzala Malik.

Jamie McGrigor: I am happy to second that.

Hanzala Malik was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Good luck, Hanzala. I look forward to working with you.

Work Programme

14:10

The Convener: Now that those formalities are completed, we can move to item 4, which is probably the most important item today, as it is on the development of our work programme for the foreseeable future. Members will have seen the helpful briefing paper that the clerks have provided. I invite members to give their comments or to mention their concerns or their aspirations about where we should go with the work programme. We will have an away day, so any ideas on that front would be helpful, too.

Bill Kidd: Congratulations on your appointment, convener.

Although this might not be exciting and although we are called the European and External Relations Committee, I suggest that, mindful of the Parliament's budget, we hold our away day internally in the Parliament.

Helen Eadie: I, too, congratulate you on your appointment, convener. I second Bill Kidd's suggestion. If we are planning a date for the away day, I ask that we consider the last week in August if possible, or the first week in September.

I turn to more substantive points about the committee's work. One suggestion in our papers is that we take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. I heartily endorse that suggestion, but I hope that, as well as having that cabinet secretary, we will consider having a broader range of ministers. For example, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will, as part of his remit, be looking at European issues coming over the horizon that affect his portfolio—likewise for the health secretary, and ditto right across the panoply of cabinet secretaries.

From my experience on the Health and Sport Committee in the previous session, I know that work was done on the European cross-border healthcare legislation. I want us to take a keen interest, along with some of the subject committees, in the potential for legislation coming over the horizon. When I was a member of a previous incarnation of this committee, Jim Wallace came regularly to brief members on his work before meetings of the Council of the European Union. I understand and know that it is member states that send ministers to the Council but, nevertheless, our ministers in Scotland ought to have a keen eye on what is developing in Europe. Had things panned out differently, we could have picked up a significant price tag as a result of the healthcare legislation. The Parliament might not have been prepared had we not taken such a keen interest in that issue.

I hope that we will endorse the suggestion that we hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs and the European officer. I hope that, in future, other ministers will come to the committee to tell us what intelligence they have in relation to their portfolios.

14:15

The Convener: I think that the clerks will have taken a note of all of that. I tried to keep up with you and I hope that the clerks managed to keep up with all that you said.

On a point of clarification, an invitation to the next committee meeting, on 28 June, is going to the cabinet secretary, so we will be having a round-table discussion with her. A briefing is also planned with officials, which will allow us to take forward ideas for our business planning day. That is already happening. We can talk about some of the initial outline points.

Hanzala Malik: It might be useful if we considered three issues at our away day. One is what strategy Scotland will adopt. There is now a Scottish Parliament but, historically, city councils engaged overseas with cities and countries. We need to focus our efforts on a strategic review of what we want to do with those relationships that have existed historically.

The second issue that we should look at is the international engagement that will come out of that. Cities throughout Scotland have twinned with cities overseas or have memoranda of understanding with them. We should establish the success rates of those arrangements and how we wish to engage—whether we should allow local authorities to continue to build such relationships or whether the Scottish Parliament should take a view on them.

Last but not least is the issue of Eurocities. Glasgow City Council, for example, is a member of Eurocities, but many other cities are not. It would be possible to take a strategic view on that, too. Should we club together and have clusters of cities that will be members of Eurocities to be effective in Europe, or will the Scottish Parliament take a direct role in that area of work? It would be quite helpful to consider those issues during our away day.

Aileen McLeod: It would be extremely helpful to have the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs attend a meeting of the committee before the summer recess. Obviously, it would be helpful for us to be able to discuss directly with the Scottish Government its priorities in its European Union and international engagement. That should help to inform our work programme over the next few years. It would also be extremely helpful to have input from our European officer in Brussels

and our Scottish Parliament information centre European researcher. Such an approach would help us to plan our away day, when we will have the opportunity to discuss many issues. Furthermore, it would be invaluable if, at the away day, we had input on our work programme from our six Scottish MEPs, given the amount of European legislation that is being discussed in the European Parliament that will obviously have a serious impact on Scottish domestic legislation.

Annabelle Ewing: Those are excellent suggestions. To pick up on what Helen Eadie said, I think that it would be interesting if, in the fourth session of the Parliament, our committee tried to find a way of working with other committees that works. I appreciate the difficulties involved in working closely with other relevant committees in the Parliament, but that would really be a feat that has not, I think, hitherto been achieved, for whatever reason—probably because of the nature of our brief as elaborated through the various means that have been discussed. Nonetheless, it would be a feather in our cap if we tried to establish a way of working with the other relevant committees to further the remit that is before us, which is a very big task.

Helen Eadie: I totally support what Annabelle Ewing has said. I know from work that has been done on subject committees that that is a critical point.

I have a copy of a letter from Alyn Smith, who is an SNP MEP. It was quite openly passed to me from Catherine Stihler—I think that Alyn Smith's intention is that his message should be spread as wide as possible, so I do not think that he would have any problem with my sharing it. In the letter, he points to how other committees work in other member states. I appreciate that Scotland is not the member state—obviously, it is the United Kingdom that is the member state—but I note that some very interesting work is being done with regard to the ways in which our equivalent committees in those other countries engage. It would be worth considering Alyn Smith's paper a little further and picking out the best points from it.

Another stakeholder with whom it is important that we engage is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The work that I did when I was on Fife Council and the more recent conversations that I have had with representatives of COSLA suggest that it would be eager to engage with us, as it has a number of European concerns that are pertinent to it. Many local authorities in Scotland have been proactive in their engagement on a wider European basis—historically, Strathclyde Regional Council was one of the best. I would like us to have a good relationship with COSLA so that we can help with its work.

Jamie McGrigor: All the suggestions so far are good. It would be useful if, rather than discussing only procedural affairs, we discussed issues that are coming from Europe that affect Scotland. For example, one of the most important issues for rural Scotland is the common agricultural policy, which is up for review now. We are not going to be the lead committee in that regard, but we ought to have some input into the discussions on it and, possibly, the common fisheries policy.

The Convener: Those are interesting and varied suggestions. Everybody's contributions will add something to our work programme. I take it that members are happy for the clerks to organise an away day. The proposal is that it take place in late August or early September, and the clerks will bear in mind Bill Kidd's suggestion that it take place internally but not too internally—we have got a few ideas that might meet his wishes. The clerks will liaise directly with members with regard to the date. Members should get in touch with the clerks if they have any further ideas about who should be there.

I have Alyn Smith's letter, and I am digesting it. We will respond to it when we are ready to do so.

Do we agree to invite the cabinet secretary to our next meeting?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The clerks have already broached that subject with the cabinet secretary, so that should be okay. We will have her along and we will discuss what Aileen McLeod was talking about: what the Government's priorities are and how we can work with those priorities in a complementary manner and do some different things as well.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

14:24

The Convener: Under item 5, I ask the committee to agree to take some business in private. Members will know that, sometimes, committees have to take certain items in private, and I want to get your agreement up front about whether we should do that.

We have agreed to take evidence from the cabinet secretary at our next meeting, and I propose that we have an agenda item in private following that session so that we can digest what the cabinet secretary has told us and consider what action we want to take as a result of what she has said. Are people happy to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That completes today's business—short and sweet. The next meeting will take place on 28 June. It will be the final meeting before recess, but do not bring in snakes and ladders or Connect 4, because it is not like the last day at school.

Meeting closed at 14:25.

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