



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 30 May 2013

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**Thursday 30 May 2013**

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**EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2013, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

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

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)

\*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

\*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

\*attended

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Katy Orr

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 6



## Scottish Parliament

### European and External Relations Committee

*Thursday 30 May 2013*

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Christina McKelvie):** Good morning and welcome to the European and External Relations Committee's 10th meeting in 2013. I make the usual request that mobile phones and electronic devices be switched off.

We move swiftly to agenda item 1, which is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take items 4 and 5 in private and to consider in private at future meetings draft reports on our inquiry into foreign language learning in primary schools?

**Members** indicated agreement.

## "Brussels Bulletin"

09:01

**The Convener:** Item 2 is consideration of the latest edition of the "Brussels Bulletin". As members will see, we have received another comprehensive "Brussels Bulletin" from Scotland Europa. Do members have any questions or comments?

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** I will kick off on bees. I notice that the bulletin mentions that a European week of bees and pollination will be held in Brussels. Will similar initiatives be held in member states? That is my question.

**The Convener:** We can find out for you.

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** In the future, we should consider inviting people from Brussels to Edinburgh not only so that they can participate in our meetings but so that we can hear about areas of interest in which they could guide us. That would be of mutual benefit to all. Perhaps we can extend an invitation to people in Brussels to consider that in years to come.

**The Convener:** Are you making a general suggestion or a suggestion about specific items?

**Hanzala Malik:** Looking back at the difficulties and challenges that we faced with the fisheries negotiations, which went on for rather a long time and produced a result that we are not 100 per cent satisfied with, I think that it would be good if we could rehearse our concerns with Brussels officials at first hand rather than second hand. It might be an idea for us to extend an invitation to them.

**The Convener:** That seems a good idea. If we have specific concerns, we could start there first and see where we go with that. In the autumn, the committee will hear from visitors from Brussels, who will talk about European Union priorities, so that might provide a framework for where we want to go. On particular issues that affect Scotland, you make a good point, which is noted.

**Hanzala Malik:** Once we have the white paper, it might be an idea for us to go through that to see what our priorities are and then try to target some of those priorities by engaging with people sooner rather than later.

**The Convener:** That point is noted.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I bring to the committee's attention the Atlantic action plan, which is mentioned on page 1. As a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I am aware that BIPA members have proposed that we should engage more directly on the action plan. I am not totally familiar with the

issue, but it seems to have some potential for us here in Scotland. For example, the bulletin refers to the blue economy, which I understand refers to the possibilities of developing the economies bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

In the middle of page 3, the bulletin states:

"Partnership Agreements ... are due to be finalised before the end of 2013".

The question for us is whether the Scottish Government or the United Kingdom Government engages with that. I would be obliged to the clerks if they could find out the answer to that so that, if we can play a part, we ensure that we do so.

**The Convener:** We can certainly find that out and raise the issue with the appropriate people.

**Willie Coffey:** That is super.

**The Convener:** One of the main aspects of that is the horizon 2020 programme, in which the committee has taken an active interest. There are key hooks into the partnership agreements that are relevant to the committee's work.

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I highlight the section on education and youth, which indicates that there should be

"European funding programmes which support mobility, exchange and skills development"

and which are targeted at those from disadvantaged backgrounds. That is perhaps an interesting opportunity for some of our further education colleges to get more involved in exchange programmes. Obviously, we are looking at the widening access agenda through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, so we should keep an eye on that interesting development.

**The Convener:** Absolutely. I have highlighted that as one of my interests, too. We should get an update from the UK Government on the youth guarantee scheme, because I believe that it is yet to sign up to that. It would be good to know whether progress has been made. Are members happy to raise that issue?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The bulletin states:

"A key area of contention is discards of unwanted fish".

There is a bit of ambiguity, because it says that

"Sweden was the only Member State that called for an outright ban on discards",

but that

"The European Parliament wants the ban introduced immediately".

I presume that the Swedish members do not want that. I do not really understand that paragraph.

**The Convener:** Katy Orr has just told me that that is the Swedish position on the Commission, not that of Swedish MEPs.

**Katy Orr (Clerk):** It is on the Council.

**The Convener:** Yes—the Council.

**Jamie McGrigor:** Wait a minute—it is the European Parliament that wants the ban, not the Commission.

**The Convener:** It is the Swedish position on the Council.

**Jamie McGrigor:** Oh, the Swedish position on the Council.

**The Convener:** The European Parliament wants the ban, but the Swedish position on the Council is that it is not convinced.

**Jamie McGrigor:** What about the Swedish MEPs?

**The Convener:** I am not sure, but we can certainly ask Scotland Europa to update us on that and clarify it.

**Jamie McGrigor:** I just think that it is rather ambiguous.

I have another point, which is about the Atlantic plan. The bulletin states that the strategy

"will rely on ... voluntary implementation by the Member States".

To me, that does not sound like the sort of thing that will have much teeth.

**Willie Coffey:** It has access to European structural funds, so I imagine that there will be considerable interest in getting a slice of whatever is possible.

**Jamie McGrigor:** Yes—the blue economy.

I just wanted to make those points because it seems to me that the bulletin is getting a bit looser and is not as tight as it was.

**The Convener:** That is good feedback. We can certainly ensure that that is fed back to the authors and that we get some of that tightened up a bit. You are absolutely right.

The final sentence in that section states:

"The Action Plan will now be subject to endorsement by the European Parliament and Council."

I suspect that, although the plan is voluntary, there will be a sign-up agreement. As Willie Coffey suggests, if there is funding behind it, people will be keen to engage with it.

I think that Rod Campbell wanted to come in.

**Roderick Campbell:** No—the issue has been clarified by Katy Orr's comments.

**Willie Coffey:** I have a comment on another matter. I draw the committee's attention to the comments on page 7, under the heading "Digital Agenda". There is a proposal to move towards a single telecommunications market in Europe that could ultimately result in the end of roaming charges, which I am sure would be welcome for consumers throughout Europe. I very much doubt that that will lead us down the road of a single broadcasting market. However, that is a step in the right direction, because I am sure that one of the most common complaints that members hear is about roaming charges when people move from country to country.

Quite a bit of work has been done on the matter in Europe in the past few years, but a telecoms market throughout the European Union with no roaming charges would really help to boost economies in Europe.

**The Convener:** That is noted.

**Hanzala Malik:** We need to keep a close eye on the financial framework, as we are aware that it provides opportunities to court. In our deliberations, witnesses were surprised that moneys were left over in the European Union nearly every year and that not all moneys are applied for. Therefore, there are opportunities. If we want to ensure that we are a major player in respect of those opportunities, we really need to have someone looking at the matter specifically for us so that we can circulate information to organisations that would be eligible to apply. It would be helpful if that were done sooner rather than later so that we have support in place for organisations.

**The Convener:** Okay.

I see that there was a further round of trilogue meetings from 28 May, which was two days ago. We should get an update from Scotland Europa on what happened in them. The Irish presidency is really pushing for the matter to be resolved, and its time is quickly running out, as the Irish demit office on 30 June.

**Hanzala Malik:** That is exactly why we should get our skates on and be in place and ready.

**The Convener:** Yes. We will get a detailed update from Scotland Europa on the meetings from 28 May.

**Clare Adamson:** I have a request for further information, if providing that would be possible—perhaps the Scottish Parliament information centre could provide it for us. The section on renewables in the bulletin talks about member states' positions, which is perfectly reasonable, but I would be interested in getting a breakdown of the positions of Scotland and the rest of the UK, given that we have very strong renewables targets in

Scotland. It would be interesting to see further details on that.

**The Convener:** Yes, that would be interesting. The bulletin says:

"the EU has set a target for renewable energy at 20% of total energy consumption".

I think that Scotland is already hitting above that. It would be interesting to see how well we are doing against that target.

**Willie Coffey:** I will make my last contribution on the bulletin. I refer to the "Upcoming Events & Meetings" section on page 10. Members will notice that a digital agenda assembly is planned in Dublin on 19 June. It would be useful if we could somehow get the output from that assembly and see whatever thinking is going on, as we have mentioned in the committee a number of issues to do with the digital agenda, broadband and the possible cut in budgets to support broadband infrastructure throughout Europe. Something useful for us might come out of that. It would be helpful to hear what was said.

**The Convener:** Okay—we could get some information.

Are members content with the "Brussels Bulletin" and to pass it on to relevant committees for their consideration?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## European Union Structural Funds

09:13

**The Convener:** Item 3 is EU structural funds. Members will see a letter from the Deputy First Minister in their papers and will know that the Scottish Government agreed to update us about every six months on progress with European structural funds. Do members have any comments or questions?

**Hanzala Malik:** I can only repeat what I have already said. I think that that encapsulates all our previous difficulties and that we can overcome them. It is important that we engage in the fullest way possible. Even if we just did that, that would go a long way to ensuring that we address many of the issues that we have not been able to address historically. I look forward to the support being put in place.

**Clare Adamson:** The Scottish Government has negotiated a good position in the UK on the matter, but I note that things cannot be finalised until the budget negotiations are finalised. Much depends on that, and we should note that.

**Willie Coffey:** My attention was drawn to the Deputy First Minister's comment on the youth employment initiative at the bottom of page 4 of paper 2. A possibility for us to tackle high levels of youth unemployment in south-west Scotland might be opened up. I would be very grateful if we could do something there. The committee should keep a watching eye on how that might develop.

**Roderick Campbell:** I echo Willie Coffey's comments on the youth employment initiative. The committee should try to ensure that we get enough information to monitor that. Perhaps we could relay that to the Scottish Government.

**The Convener:** We will do that.

Members are happy to note the letter. Do members have suggestions on any other action, apart from Rod Campbell's suggestion? No—it is a contented bunch this morning.

We move on to item 4, which we agreed to take in private.

09:15

*Meeting continued in private until 11:22.*



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