

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 31st March 2015, 5.30pm

Committee Room 4

Next Meeting

Tuesday, 26th May 2015, 5.30pm

Committee Room 4

Attendees

Colin Beattie MSP
Eleoma Bodammer, Edinburgh University
Cameron Buchanan MSP
Manuela Calchini, VisitScotland
John Clifford, Hon. Austrian Consulate
Annette Götzkes, Edinburgh University
Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Consul General of Germany
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament
Peter Müller-McDougall, Swiss Consulate General
Barbara Strickland, German citizen
Petra Wend, QMU
Petra Wetzel, West Brewery

Apologies Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Barbara Kaulbach, Sigrid Rieuwerts, Heinrich Schnettger, James Trolland

Colin Beattie (CB) opened the meeting at 17.42.

Topics Discussed:

Approval of previous minutes

The group read through the previous minutes. Verena Gräfin von Roedern (VGR) asked that the Holocaust Day events she mentioned in an email following the last meeting be included.

Subject to this change the minutes were approved.

Petra Wend (PWn) asked for an update on the action points. Graeme Henderson (GH) confirmed that he had received feedback from the group re. comments for a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and that the German Consulate is in contact with stakeholders at the Scottish Government.

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Petra Wetzel – West Brewery

CB welcomed Petra Wetzel (PWt) from the West Brewery to the meeting. PWt thanked the group for the invitation, and spoke of some of the work the West Brewery was involved with.

PWt said that, since she had taken over the Brewery in 2008, it had grown from a small microbrewery to a global exporter employing 85 people and with a £10m turnover. PWt noted that the company is growing at around 40-50% year on year.

PWt said that, around 24 months ago, demand was outstripping capacity and the Brewery found a brewing partner in Bavaria who brewed some of the beers under licence. These beers are now being brewed back in Scotland.

PWt spoke of a Scottish Government grant the Brewery was being given (as part of the EU Action Plan) that would be used to create a new brewery on Glasgow Green, and invited the group to visit the new brewery once it opens later in the autumn. She further mentioned a new hospitality venture that would open in around four weeks, featuring German food and German beers.

PWt mentioned that Heriot-Watt University is the only place in Scotland that teaches brewing, and that in her opinion the University was not producing enough brewers to meet the demand for brewing in this country. She spoke of TBAS, the newly-formed Scottish Brewers' Association, and how having such an association provides more worldwide clout to Scottish brewers.

Cameron Buchanan (CBu) asked why the Brewery had been formed in the first place. PWt said the inspiration had come from her father, who said the beer in Scotland wasn't up to scratch. PWt noted that craft brewers in the UK still only comprised around 3-4% of the market.

VGR asked how smaller breweries can compete with larger breweries. PWt said that the Small Breweries Duty Relief, which had come into force not long before West Brewery opened, had provided a major boon. West is paying around £25 duty per keg. CB asked what the criteria for the Duty is. PWt said brewing under 50,000 hectolitres would allow you to qualify – West at the moment brews 20,000 and aims to grow to 35,000.

CBu asked where West sold its beers, and how many varieties there were. PWt said they have eight varieties and these are sold, mainly through pubs and restaurants in draught, but also the one bottled ale (St Mungos) is sold through supermarkets and off licences. The group then discussed the differences between Scotland and Germany in terms of the legal age and criteria one can drink a beer.

CB asked how West managed to penetrate the drinks market. PWt said that a local bar owner asked if he could sell West in his bar, which prompted PWt and her colleagues to put in place a system for selling to other bars, and it largely took off from there. They are now selling 180,000 bottles every six months and 4000 kegs a month.

Eleoma Boddamer (EB) noted that the beer duty escalator was pegged to inflation. PWt said that inflation did not affect the Brewery particularly .

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The group then discussed the Christmas Market in Edinburgh, and other potential sponsorship opportunities. PWt said West would love to have a stall at the Market.

EB asked what German connections the Brewery maintained. PWt said that the retired, former chief brewer from the Weihenstephan brewery is an acting consultant, and that West still imports all its hops from Germany. PWt said she was hoping to persuade the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment to look at the issue of having specialist hop growers in Scotland.

CB thanked PWt for speaking with the group.

CB asked GH to circulate the list of potential speakers to the group again, with a deadline for feedback.

Action point – Graeme Henderson to circulate the list of potential speakers, and CPG members to feed back to GH by the specified deadline

Cultural update

VGR mentioned the ‘Germans in Britain’ exhibition that is presently touring the UK, and also the ‘Gathering the Voices’ exhibition.

PWt noted that Scotland plays Germany in a football match on 7th September.

Annette Götzkes (AG) said that the Edinburgh International Festival will feature several German productions, including the Magic Flute.

Peter Müller-McDougall (PMcD) mentioned the Ballett Zürich would be at the Edinburgh Playhouse from 27th-29th August, and that the Swiss comedy Murrel Murrel would be showing at the King’s Theatre from 28th-30th August.

VGR noted that several German authors would be featured at the Edinburgh Book Festival.

Political/Economic update

VGR said that the situation was quite positive at the moment. Unemployment in Germany had dropped to below 3 million, while the growth forecast had been upgraded to 1.8% of GDP. VGR noted that no solution had yet been found to the Greek financial crisis and that there was still worry over Russia and potential future sanctions. Further, the nuclear deal with Iran would be of interest and the recent ISIS attacks in Tunisia may have a very bad effect on that country’s tourism industry.

The Group noted its condolences for people affected by the recent Germanwings plane crash.

AOB

Manuela Calchini (MC) said that VisitScotland was holding its annual exhibition in Aberdeen in April. PWn informed CB that due to her diary she would be unlikely to attend future meetings on Wednesday evenings.

Colin Beattie closed the meeting at 18.48.