European and External Relations Committee

2nd Report, 2013 (Session 4)

Annual Report 2012-13

Published by the Scottish Parliament on 10 June 2013
European and External Relations Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

The remit of the European and External Relations Committee is to consider and report on-

(a) proposals for European Communities legislation;
(b) the implementation of European Communities legislation;
(c) any European Communities or European Union issue;
(d) the development and implementation of the Scottish Administration's links with countries and territories outside Scotland, the European Communities (and their institutions) and other international organisations; and
(e) co-ordination of the international activities of the Scottish Administration.

*(Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, Rule 6.8)*

Membership:

Clare Adamson
Roderick Campbell
Willie Coffey
Helen Eadie
Hanzala Malik (Deputy Convener)
Jamie McGrigor
Christina McKelvie (Convener)

Committee Clerking Team:

Senior Assistant Clerk
Katy Orr

Assistant Clerks
Lauren Spaven-Donn
Jenny Goldsmith
European and External Relations Committee

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The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the European and External Relations Committee during the Parliamentary year from 11 May 2012 to 10 May 2013.

Inquiries and reports

European Union Structural Funds

2. The Committee identified European Union Structural Funds as a priority area of interest and agreed to conduct an inquiry into the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the 2007-2013 structural fund programmes, with a view to understanding how to improve outcomes for Scotland in the 2014–2020 funding round.

3. The inquiry was conducted in two stages. Stage one was a comprehensive period of fact-finding, which involved a roundtable discussion with stakeholders, dialogue with the Scottish Government and other interested parties, as well as discussion with the European Commission. Stage 2 explored Scotland’s structural fund delivery mechanisms and the shortcomings of the current and proposed EU regulations governing the management of structural fund programmes.

The European Union’s Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Development

4. The Committee’s inquiry into the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Programme for Research and Development was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved fact-finding sessions with key stakeholders, EU actors and the Scottish Government. Three key themes emerged from this stage of the inquiry: poor awareness of funding opportunities, in general, and Horizon 2020 opportunities, in particular, the key importance of the scale of support available to applicants, and the importance of establishing networks to share good practice, provide mentoring and resource, and early warning of developments.

5. The second stage was a high-level conference held on 25 May 2012 to discuss these three themes in more detail. The conference was attended by a wide range of stakeholders. The inquiry report included the proceedings of the
conference, which also informed a number of recommendations both to the European Commission and the Scottish Parliament.

**Developments in the Eurozone and their implications for communication between the Scottish and UK Governments**

6. The Committee held three evidence sessions to consider the implications for communication between the Scottish and UK Governments of developments surrounding the Fiscal Compact, which is an intergovernmental treaty designed to reinforce the existing fiscal rules and establish automatic stabilising/corrective mechanisms for countries that failed to meet their budgetary obligations.

**Foreign language learning in primary schools**

7. The Committee initiated an inquiry into the Scottish Government’s proposal to increase foreign language learning in primary schools, which plans to enable all young people to learn two languages (as well as their mother tongue) from the first year of primary school onwards, based on the European Union 1 + 2 model.

8. The inquiry was held in three phases. During the first phase, members of the Committee visited seven primary schools across Scotland. Under the second phase, it took oral evidence during committee meetings and collected written evidence. The third phase consisted of a major conference in the Scottish Parliament that brought together over a hundred stakeholders, including representatives from the business and cultural sectors and community groups. Conference delegates discussed the key issues that emerged during the earlier phases of the inquiry, in order to help develop conclusions and recommendations for the Committee’s inquiry report.

**The Scottish Government’s Draft Budget**

9. The Committee scrutinised the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2013-14 and reported to the Finance Committee.

**Scottish Government’s Country Plan for China and its International Framework**

10. The Committee initiated an inquiry into the economic dimension of the Scottish Government’s Country Plan for China (“the China Plan”), focusing on its impact on businesses in Scotland and the potential for further expansion in trade and investment with China. The Committee began its inquiry by visiting several businesses based in Scotland that had some form of trade with, or investment from, China. The Convener, Clare Adamson and Jamie McGrigor, launched the China Plan inquiry at the Scottish Salmon Company office in Edinburgh. Jamie McGrigor also visited a Marine Harvest Ltd. fish processing plant in Fort William and Helen Eadie and Roderick Campbell met with the management team of Todd & Duncan Ltd. a textiles firm in Kinross. These visits gave the Committee a basis on which to begin taking oral evidence and the findings from the meetings informed its Report on the inquiry.

**European Union funding**

11. During its earlier inquiries into EU Structural Funds and the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Development, the Committee became aware of a number of potential EU funding sources which were either under-utilised or not utilised by Scotland. As a first step to exploring this issue further, the Committee commissioned SPICe to undertake a comprehensive review of EU
funds available to Scotland, together with a measure of how successful Scotland (the Government, government agencies, local authorities or individual stakeholders) had been in securing funds.

Fisheries conservation
12. The Committee commissioned comparative research from SPICe on the sea fisheries conservation measures adopted by each of the EU’s national fleets.

Engagement and innovation
13. The Committee hosted two major events in the Scottish Parliament: the conference on Horizon 2020 was held on 25 May 2012 and the conference on foreign language learning in primary schools on 10 May 2013.

14. The Horizon 2020 conference brought together a wide range of stakeholders from academia, business and the public sector to discuss how Scotland could best engage on Horizon 2020.

15. Short videos were made at strategic points for the foreign language learning in primary schools inquiry, to generate engagement on social media. The videos included footage of the visits to schools, and interviews with teachers and pupils and the keynote speakers at the conference. Discussions on social media were initiated to accompany the investigative visits to schools by members and to promote debate on Members’ findings from the visits. The discussions on the Scottish Parliament’s Facebook pages proved very popular with a large number of people engaging via this medium.

16. The Committee held an evidence session with Humza Yousaf, Minister for External Affairs and International Development, following his appointment as Minister.

17. The Committee invited all Scottish MEPs to the Committee to discuss European Union policy developments. An evidence session with Ian Hudghton MEP on the European Commission Work Programme 2013 was held in November 2012.

18. The Committee took evidence from Dr Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Economist of the European Policy Centre on the Eurozone crisis and its impact on Scotland.

19. The Convener attended meetings of the Committee of the European chairs – UK Forum (the Chairs of the European committees of the parliaments and devolved assemblies in the UK). The Committee appointed the Convener as a Reporter on issues of interest to the Committee arising from a Committee of the Regions Open Days event on ‘strengthening the role of nations and regions in the recovery strategy’. The Committee continued to work closely with external partners, including Scottish MEPs and representatives of the European institutions.

20. On 24 January 2013, the Committee met with visiting members of the Canada/UK Inter-parliamentary Association to discuss the Committee’s proposed

21. On 6 February 2013, the Committee hosted a visit from the Bulgarian Ambassador to the UK, His Excellency Mr Konstantin Dimitrov.

Scottish Parliament European Union strategy

Report on EU Priorities of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament

22. The Scottish Parliament’s EU strategy seeks to mainstream the scrutiny of EU issues, while facilitating early engagement on the development of EU proposals and scrutiny of subsidiarity issues.

23. The Committee co-ordinated the Scottish Parliament’s consideration of the European Commission’s Work Programme 2013. Each of the Scottish Parliament’s subject committees scrutinised the European Commission’s Work Programme for 2013 and reported back to the Committee. The Committee analysed these responses and incorporated them into a report on the EU Priorities of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament. This report was debated in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament on 26 February 2013.

The Brussels Bulletin

24. The Brussels Bulletin assists committees in their consideration of EU issues and provides information on forthcoming EU initiatives of significance for Scotland. The Brussels Bulletin is considered by the Committee and then forwarded to other committees.

25. Over the course of the parliamentary year, the Committee considered a range of topical issues relating to European Union enlargement, structural funds, economic growth, water management, energy, digital technology and broadband. The Committee also considered matters relating to the Eurozone, the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy and the Multiannual Financial Framework.

Visits

26. In December 2012, a two-day visit to Brussels was organised to provide an induction programme for the European Reporters from other parliamentary committees on the European Institutions and key policy areas. This was part of the mainstreaming approach in the Scottish Parliament’s European Union strategy.

Protected characteristics

27. The Committee, in line with Scottish Parliament policy, continues to mainstream equality issues in all areas of its work. For example, in its inquiry into foreign language learning in primary schools, the Committee considered British Sign Language and how language learning opportunities could best be tailored for children with additional support needs.

Meetings

28. During the reporting period (11 March 2012 to 10 May 2013), the Committee met 20 times and 15 meetings were partly held in private. 23 items were taken in
private, 9 for consideration of draft reports, 5 for consideration of approaches to inquiries, 3 to consider key themes following evidence sessions, 2 to consider the Committee’s work programme, 1 to consider the Horizon 2020 Conference, 1 to consider witness expenses and 1 to consider the Committee’s Annual Report.

29. All formal committee meetings were held in Edinburgh.

30. In the course of these meetings, the Committee took evidence by video conference on one occasion and in total from 64 witnesses.
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