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Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 18 February 2014

Session 4

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[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Father Gerard Maguiness, the parish priest of St Ignatius of Loyola Church, Wishaw.

Father Gerard Maguiness (St Ignatius of Loyola Church, Wishaw): I wish to thank the Presiding Officer and MSPs for their invitation to speak today.

While preparing my thought one month ago I was listening to the top 40 on the radio. Number 1 in the charts was Pharrell Williams with "Happy". This very catchy song contains the line, "Clap along if you feel that happiness is the truth." Mr Williams expresses a desire to define happiness. Whether we be classical philosophers, theologians, pop singers or indeed politicians, all of us seek to discover authentic happiness that will indeed lead us to the truth of who we are as human beings.

I am the parish priest of St Ignatius of Loyola parish in Wishaw. Our parish was founded 155 years ago, mainly by immigrant Irish workers. It was dedicated to the Spanish saint who founded the Company of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, in recognition of the trade links between Lanarkshire and northern Spain at the time of the parish's foundation.

St Ignatius was originally a young knight who sought fulfilment and glory on the battlefield. After being injured at the battle of Pamplona, he was confined to bed for one year. During that period Ignatius read the lives of the great knights and also of the saints, since they were the only books available in the monastery where he convalesced.

After much reflection he concluded that not all of our activities lead to true happiness. Victory on the battlefield does not have any value unless it establishes lasting peace. Similarly, personal happiness is found not in serving oneself for an instant high but through serving others for an enduring happiness. St Ignatius called this discovery the discernment of spirits.

In his spiritual exercises, Ignatius exhorts us to test the spirit of what we are doing in life to make sure that it leads to true and lasting happiness and is not just a quick fix or a passing fashion and, moreover, that this happiness is not just about

"me" but takes into account the welfare of all—what we call in the Catholic tradition the common good.

True happiness leads to true goodness and vice versa. As you continue to legislate for the good of the Scottish people, I pray that you can be happy, clap your hands, and discern the true happiness that promotes and protects the dignity of every man, woman and child.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

Before we move to the next item of business, I inform members that a motion to revise business tomorrow has been lodged and will be taken just before decision time today. The motion proposes that the business tomorrow begins at 1.30 pm and that decision time will be 8 pm, to allow more time for the stage 3 proceedings on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. A revised section A of the Business Bulletin has been issued and copies will be available at the back of the chamber.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Independence (European Union Membership)

1. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the comments of the President of the European Commission that it would be “extremely difficult, if not impossible” for an independent Scotland to join the European Union. (S4T-00600)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): The decision on Scottish independence is for the Scottish people and the decision about continuing membership of the European Union will be for the member states. These are not decisions for the European Commission. Of course, no member state has said that it would seek to veto Scotland’s continuing membership.

It would be against the interests of not just Scotland but the entire European Union for Scotland to be outside of that union. It would also be contrary to the founding principles of the European Union for Scotland to be excluded just because Scots had exercised their democratic right to self-determination.

Drew Smith: The problems that the nationalists’ campaign faces this week are because of their failure to understand that it is not up to them simply to assert the national interests of others.

At the weekend, I listened carefully when Mr Swinney called Mr Barroso “preposterous”. I also listened to what the Deputy First Minister has said today, just as we listened when she said that Scotland would be automatically admitted into the EU and when Alex Salmond said that the Government had legal advice to back up that claim.

It is now clear to everyone that Scotland can only join the EU as an independent member state by negotiation and with the agreement of the other member states. We know—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): A question, Mr Smith.

Drew Smith: We know that the process of negotiation may be difficult and that even the Scottish Government does not always get its own way when it negotiates. Up for negotiation—

The Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, Mr Smith?

Drew Smith: —will be the British rebate, border arrangements including tuition fees, and, crucially, euro membership.

I ask the Deputy First Minister one very direct and simple question: what will be Alex Salmond’s red line? On the issue of the euro—I listened carefully to what John Swinney said at the weekend—is the Scottish Government ruling out signing any accession treaty that contains any clause committing Scotland to euro membership at any time?

Nicola Sturgeon: The big problem for the no campaign is that, having failed abysmally to inspire anyone to vote no, it has to resort to scaring, bullying and intimidating people into doing so.

The process of negotiation and agreement that Drew Smith mentioned is laid out very clearly in the “Scotland’s Future” white paper, as is our intention to argue for the transition of European membership with continuity of effect—in other words, with no detriment to the interests of any other member state.

I say this to Drew Smith. He and I disagree on the issue of independence, but I have always—perhaps until today—thought of him as someone who reaches his positions from the point of principle. I ask him to take a step back and consider what is being suggested here.

Scotland has been in the European Union for 40 years; we have complied with EU law for 40 years; and we have contributed to the EU for 40 years. The suggestion is that, simply as a result of exercising our democratic right to self-determination, we would find ourselves outside the EU.

Not only is there no basis for that in the European treaties, common sense, the interests of the wider EU or anything any member state has said; it would in fact be an absolute affront to democracy and against the founding principles of the European Union. I would have thought that any democrat—whether on the yes or no side—would find that position to be completely and utterly acceptable.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Given that a European Commission spokesperson is backtracking on Mr Barroso’s comments, does the Deputy First Minister agree with Professor Michael Keating, who has said that the comparison drawn by President Barroso between an independent Scotland and Kosovo is

“utterly misplaced”

and

“is dangerous and a disservice to democracy itself”?

Nicola Sturgeon: The comparison between Scotland and Kosovo is completely and utterly ridiculous. I noted that, yesterday, President

Barroso's spokesperson said that that was not a "perfect analogy". That probably qualifies as the understatement of the century.

An independent Scotland is a model European state and we meet all the membership criteria of the European Union. Graham Avery, honorary director general of the European Commission, said:

"It is obvious that the commonsense solution would be for Scotland's membership of the EU to be effective on the same day as its independence, and it is obvious that 5 million Scottish citizens, who have been European citizens for 40 years, should not be treated in the same way as people of non-member countries, or third countries as they are called in the Euro-jargon."—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 30 January 2014; c 1731.]

This is an argument that cries out for common sense. This side of the chamber applies that common sense; the sooner those on the no side ditch the scaremongering and apply some basic common sense, the better.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I do not know what polls the Deputy First Minister reads, but I read different ones, and the account is not as she describes it.

The Deputy First Minister accepts that other member states in the EU must agree the admission of an independent Scotland in order for it to become a member. Common sense—to which she is clearly attached—says that member states can say yes but they can also say no.

Given that the other member states will also decide the conditions attaching to membership for an independent Scotland, will the Deputy First Minister say whether there are red line issues for Alex Salmond and what they are? Her silence on that aspect will be taken as a no.

Nicola Sturgeon: I did not mention polls in any of my previous answers, although if my memory is wrong on that I stand to be corrected. However, I am happy to mention the opinion polls, because of course it is the narrowing of the polls and the swing towards yes that has occasioned the intensifying of scaremongering from the no campaign in recent days.

Annabel Goldie says that all member states will require to agree. That is a statement of fact that is set out in the white paper. I challenge her to name me a single member state—including Spain, which is often cited as the one that would want to give us trouble—that has said that it would veto or try to block Scotland's continuing membership. Until she can do that, she is indulging in nothing more than empty and baseless scaremongering.

The irony of a Tory talking about red lines in a discussion about the European Union is breathtaking. We argue for transition of

membership, from being a member as part of the United Kingdom to being an independent member, on the basis of continuity of effect. If Annabel Goldie wants to know the detail on that, I can tell her, first, that we would not be in the euro—no country can be forced into the euro against its will, as Sweden ably demonstrates. Secondly, on Schengen, the European Union exists to take down borders between countries, not to do things that would erect borders between countries—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order!

Nicola Sturgeon: Thirdly, on the rebate, we have made it absolutely clear that the rebate would be a matter for negotiation between the Scottish and UK Governments until the next budget period of the European Union.

Those are the facts, and the fact that the parties in the better together Tory-Labour alliance are so determined to try to scare the people of Scotland is proof positive that things are not going their way and that the polls are moving in the direction of yes.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): The idea that the First Minister is pulling the strings in 28 capital cities around Europe is Napoleonic in its bravado. The truth is closer to what the Croatian ambassador said in a visit to the Parliament. He said that, with the EU, "you take pretty much what is offered".

For the third time, will Nicola Sturgeon say what she is prepared to give up to get in?

Nicola Sturgeon: My apologies to Willie Rennie: I forgot to mention the Liberal Democrats in the Labour-Tory-Liberal Democrat better together alliance.

I have made it clear, as the white paper makes it clear, that we are not arguing for any change in the terms of the relationship between Scotland and the European Union from the terms that pertain to our relationship as a member of the UK. On the euro, on Schengen and on the rebate, we are arguing for continuity of effect. That is a reasonable position. The no parties in the Parliament do not exercise much reasonableness in the debate, but I think that the position of other member states would be entirely different.

Let us not forget that we are talking about Scotland—Europe's largest oil producer, the country with the biggest share of EU waters, the country whose renewable energy potential is key to the EU meeting its renewable energy targets, a major exporter of premium products such as whisky, and home to thousands upon thousands of European nationals. It is not in only Scotland's interests that Scotland remains a constructive,

productive member of the European Union; it is in the interests of the entire European Union to keep Scotland as a member.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The Deputy First Minister fails to notice any parallel between Scotland's position and Kosovo's. She is perhaps aware that Kosovo is one of those countries that use someone else's currency without being a member of a currency union.

Will the Deputy First Minister try again to answer the question? Is signing a treaty that commits Scotland to being a member of the European currency union a red line that the Scottish National Party would not cross in the event of an independent Scotland? If even one of the 28 member states of the European Union suggested that that was a requirement for admission, would she simply say, "We're not going in"?

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that people in Scotland will find Lewis Macdonald's attempt to draw a comparison between Scotland and Kosovo—a comparison that even President Barroso is moving away from—quite offensive.

On the issue of euro membership, I suggest to Lewis Macdonald that before he asks such questions he does some basic research. Sweden is a perfect example—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: —of a country that has made it quite clear that it is not going to enter the euro and cannot be forced to do so against its will, because some of the criteria for euro membership, such as membership for two years of the European exchange rate mechanism, are entirely voluntary.

There is no question whatsoever of an independent Scotland being forced to use the euro against its will, and it is about time that Lewis Macdonald and his colleagues in the Tory and Labour better together alliance stopped spreading baseless scare stories.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree with me—

Members: Yes!

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Roderick Campbell: —that, whether article 48 or 49, is pursued the Commission's role is one of consultation? Does she also agree that, given Mr Barroso's role as President of that Commission, it is imprudent of him to seem to be speaking on behalf of member states?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Rod Campbell is well aware, we have set out in the white paper a process by which Scotland can make the transition from membership of the EU as part of the UK to

independent membership. We have suggested that article 48 of the European treaties is a reasonable process but, of course, the precise process that will be used will be agreed between the member states. We have always been clear on that point.

Rod Campbell is absolutely right: as I said in my original answer, the decision about independence is for the Scottish people and the decision about our continuing membership of the EU is for the member states. It is not a decision for the European Commission or, indeed, for a President of the European Commission who will not even be in office when these matters are being discussed.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I think that what is scaring the Scottish people is the lack of real clarity from the yes campaign on a number of issues, not least that of entry to the EU.

I am sure that the Deputy First Minister is well aware that, in order to be a member of the EU, a state has to sign up to a number of treaties and that those treaty provisions will apply whether the Deputy First Minister likes it or not. For the avoidance of doubt, then, I ask her—for, I think, the fourth time this afternoon—to tell us what issues would be a red line for this Government. Would it be the currency? Would it be the euro? Would she be prepared to do a deal on the rate of VAT that might apply in an independent Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not quite sure whether members, particularly those on the Labour benches, are hard of hearing or hard of understanding. I have made the currency position absolutely clear: an independent Scotland led by this Scottish Government would not be in the euro.

Patricia Ferguson: Is that a red line?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not being in the euro is absolutely a red line because we would not join the euro. I have already cited the example of Sweden, which makes it absolutely clear that no country can be forced to join the euro against its will. It is a real, live, living example of the fact that Labour is downright wrong.

Edinburgh Agreement

2. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what contact it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the Edinburgh agreement, in light of recent comments by the UK Government regarding currency and a "senior coalition source" regarding respect for the outcome of the referendum. (S4T-00601)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): On Saturday, the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister, reminding

him of the Edinburgh agreement and the commitment given in it by both of them to respect the outcome of the referendum. The First Minister also urged the Prime Minister to distance himself personally from reports that a coalition source said that a yes vote would not guarantee independence. As of this morning, there has been no response from the Westminster Government.

The Edinburgh agreement also committed both Governments to work together constructively in the interests of the people of Scotland and the rest of the UK after the referendum, whatever the result.

Bruce Crawford: Will the Deputy First Minister confirm that paragraph 30 of the Edinburgh agreement commits the Scottish and UK Governments to

“good communication and mutual respect”,

and does she agree that it is sad that the UK Government is prepared to stand by agreements only when it suits it to do so? Does she also agree that the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s repeated references to people in Scotland as “foreigners” in last week’s speech is clear evidence of a lack of respect? Like me, does she consider that the people of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland will never think of one another as foreigners, regardless of September’s outcome?

Nicola Sturgeon: Bruce Crawford is absolutely right to say that the UK Government seems to want to abide by the terms of the Edinburgh agreement only when it suits it.

However, a big problem for the no campaign—as I said in response to Drew Smith—is that it has failed completely to find any positive reasons for people to vote no in the referendum, so its only recourse is to try to scare, to bully and to intimidate the people of Scotland into voting no. I confidently predict that that tactic will not work, as we can already see in the growing backlash against George Osborne’s sermon on the pound, which took place last Thursday.

If the picture of the union that the no campaign is trying to paint is one where Scotland has no stake whatsoever in the assets of the UK—assets that we have contributed to building up—and only, according to the no campaign, a share of the debt, that begs the question why on earth anybody would want to vote to stay in such a union.

As for the issue of foreigners, any suggestion that we would be foreigners to our friends and family in the rest of the UK says more about the no campaign than it does about reality, as the perfect example of Ireland, cited by Bruce Crawford, so ably demonstrates.

Bruce Crawford: On the issue of democracy, does the Deputy First Minister also agree with me

that it is an affront to the people of Scotland for UK Government sources—followed up by people such as Baroness Jay—to suggest in any way that the outcome of the referendum next September will be pushed aside by the UK Government if the outcome is yes? Is that not a travesty of the Scottish people’s opportunity for democracy?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is a travesty of democracy, it is an affront to democracy, and it is a sign of the growing panic at the heart of the no campaign. The no campaign sees the polls narrowing and the swing towards yes, so we get treated to scaremongering of the kind that we have seen over the past few days. Just in case that does not work—and I confidently predict that it will not work—we have people such as Baroness Jay saying, “Don’t worry. Yes won’t mean yes after all.” In the interests of democracy, let me be quite clear to the people of Scotland: yes will mean yes—and I am confident that people in Scotland will vote yes.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Everyone of any significance respects the Edinburgh agreement and will accept the results of the referendum, but why does the cabinet secretary refuse to believe what UK politicians are saying about the currency? Given that the rest of the UK trades four times as much with the eurozone as it does with Scotland but has no interest in joining the euro, why does she think that transaction costs will override every other issue for the UK Government? Is her refusal to face reality and come up with a plan B based on the knowledge that a plan B will be even more resoundingly rejected by the Scottish people than what she is proposing, which is a currency union with no fiscal independence?

Nicola Sturgeon: As we all know, Malcolm Chisholm is one of the more reasonable politicians on the Opposition benches in this Parliament, but when I listen to him on the subject of the referendum, I cannot be the only one who gets the feeling that he is trying more to convince himself than anybody else.

I believe that George Osborne is bluffing and engaging in bluff and bluster, because it would be in the interests of the rest of the UK as much as it would be in the interests of Scotland for us to continue to use the pound within a sterling zone.

We know that exports from England into Scotland are worth £60 billion a year; Scotland is England’s second biggest export market. England exports more into Scotland than into China, India, Brazil and South Africa put together.

I do not think that any English businesses relish the prospect of paying an additional tax in the form of transaction costs. That is before we get to the impact on the balance of payments. Removal of oil

and gas exports alone from the sterling zone's balance of payments would blow a hole in it, would send the UK trade deficit through the roof and would impact on the value of sterling.

I think that we all know that George Osborne, backed by his new-found allies in the Labour Party and his existing allies in the Liberal Democrat Party, is engaging in campaign rhetoric. However, when the campaign is over and when Scotland has voted yes, common sense will prevail.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): Does the Deputy First Minister agree with me that although unelected peers such as Baroness Jay and Tories such as George Osborne seem to have trouble understanding basic democracy, the days of such people dictating to us should be well over? Scotland understands democracy and Scotland wishes to build a fairer and more prosperous country.

Nicola Sturgeon: Linda Fabiani is absolutely right. On top of all the other benefits of independence, I offer two more. First, we will not have an unelected House of Lords in an independent Scotland. Secondly, if Scotland votes for independence, we need never again have a Tory Government that we do not vote for.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): In any other context, I might feel that I had had a threat of getting my jotters but, on this occasion, it does not worry me any more than it has worried me in the past.

When he was confronted with the reality of a separate currency in an independent Scotland, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth claimed that that would cost English businesses £500 million a year in transaction costs, but despite being asked five times on television last night, he was unable to furnish us with the transaction costs for an independent Scotland of a separate currency.

From her basic research, will the Deputy First Minister confirm what the cost of a Salmond tax would be for an independent Scotland that used a separate currency?

Nicola Sturgeon: The problem that Annabel Goldie has is that that is not our proposal. One of the reasons why we propose a sterling zone is so that neither English businesses nor Scottish businesses would have to incur additional transaction costs. The fact that the transaction costs are entirely a George Osborne tax is something that the Tories will have to face up to.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): The Deputy First Minister talks about the positive case for the United Kingdom. She is increasingly becoming the strongest advocate for the UK. She argues for the currency union and the Bank of

England as a lender of last resort, and against transaction costs. I am pleased that she now realises what we have been arguing for for a very long time. Given that she is a nationalist who is banging the drum for keeping the UK as part of her argument for leaving the UK, has not nationalist politics now become a snake eating its own tail?

Nicola Sturgeon: The problem for Willie Rennie is that, since he went into coalition with the Tories, no one knows what the Liberal Democrats stand for or believe in—or, indeed, whether they stand for or believe in anything.

Let me help Willie Rennie by giving him a display of something that he will not see often in his party: a conviction politician who actually believes in something. I believe in Scotland being an independent and equal country. I believe in a country that pools sovereignty with our neighbours and partners across the UK and the European Union when that suits our interests, but which has the ability to take decisions here in Scotland in our own interests—decisions that will make our country more prosperous, fairer and better for everyone and for future generations to live in. That is what independence is all about.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): If Scotland votes yes, we will not have the pound. We have learned today from the Deputy First Minister that we will not join the euro. John Swinney has told us that the new currency—whatever it will be called—will cost English businesses £500 million in transaction costs. I ask the Deputy First Minister to answer the question that John Swinney has refused to answer: how much will the new currency cost Scottish businesses in transaction costs?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will be charitable to Jenny Marra. First, I welcome the fact that she accepted that Scotland is going to vote yes. That is great progress in the debate. Secondly, I reiterate the point that I have made repeatedly, just in case she did not quite catch it in previous answers: Scotland, as an independent country, will use the pound. We are making progress on two points.

If Jenny Marra—who, like Drew Smith, I am sure is someone who came into politics for the right reasons—ever again manages to reassert an identity that is separate from that of her friends in the Tory party, she will be quick to realise that what we are arguing for is in the best interests of Scotland and of the rest of the UK.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): George Osborne said that if Scotland walks away from the union, it walks away from the pound. What would women think if George Osborne said to his wife, "If you walk away from the marriage, you walk away from our assets"?

Nicola Sturgeon: The Tories must realise, as should Labour and the Liberal Democrats, that Scotland would be entitled to not just a share of liabilities, but a share of assets as well.

I do not agree with George Osborne that if we walk away from the union, we walk away from the pound, but I agree that if we decide to vote for independence, we walk away from Tory Governments that we do not vote for.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Did the Deputy First Minister, who apparently is now also the finance secretary, spend her entire political life as a "Braveheart" nationalist only to hand over power over financial regulation, the budget and the currency to the Bank of England, which would be in a foreign country should Scotland be unwise enough to become independent?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have spent my entire political life believing in and arguing for independence for Scotland and that is what I will continue to do for the next seven months until we achieve it in the referendum. I think that the real tragedy is for somebody such as Neil Findlay, who I think spent his entire political life as a deep-red socialist, now to find himself in a coalition with the Conservative Party.

City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill: Final Stage

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08974, in the name of John Lamont, on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button now. I will allow a few seconds for those who are noisily leaving the chamber to leave a bit more quietly.

14:31

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am pleased to open the final stage debate on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill and to provide Parliament with some background on the bill and the committee's scrutiny.

There have been no objections or amendments to the bill, which is the fourth private bill to come before Parliament this session. The bill has proved uncontroversial, but it has been unusual in the sense that it is the first private bill to come before Parliament that deals with two different and unconnected purposes. The first purpose of the bill is to amend section 22 of the schedule to the City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Act 1991, to allow for the erection of a statue of John Rattray on Leith Links in Edinburgh. Section 22 currently prohibits the erection of buildings, including monuments or statues, on the links.

The subject of the statue, John Rattray, was the first captain of the Company of Edinburgh Golfers, which staged the first official golf match at Leith Links in 1744. That came about when Rattray and his fellow golfers asked the city council for a silver club to be awarded annually to the winner of an open golf competition, to replace the previous prizes, which included legs of mutton and firkins of whisky. The council agreed to offer such a prize only if rules were set down and signed by Rattray, as it wanted to change the custom of the rules being made up on the day of a game. The rules written down in 1744 form the basis of the rules of today's game of golf.

Rattray himself was a very interesting character. He was a surgeon and a member of the Royal Company of Archers, as well being a keen golfer. After winning the Leith open golf competition in 1744 and 1745, he left to join the Jacobite army, and tended to the wounded at the battle of Prestonpans. He accompanied Bonnie Prince Charlie's army south to Derby and back to face defeat at Culloden, where he was seized. John Rattray was saved from being hanged only when

his golfing partner and Scotland's top judge of the time, Lord Forbes, made a personal plea on his behalf.

The sculptor commissioned to create the statue is David Annand, who has created a number of statues of prominent Scots, including the motor racing world champion from the Borders, Jim Clark; famous accordion player Sir Jimmy Shand; poet Robert Burns; and this Parliament's very own Winnie Ewing.

As I said in the preliminary stage debate on the bill, the committee is satisfied that the bill will create an exception only for this particular statue and that no further development can take place on the site at Leith Links. The committee was also satisfied that the Leith Rules Golf Society will provide to the council between 10 and 15 per cent of the capital cost of the statue for its on-going maintenance, in keeping with normal practice.

The second objective of the bill is the revitalisation of a fund that was originally set up to assist people caught up in a series of fires in Edinburgh High Street in 1824. The Surplus Fire Fund has grown from the £11,000 originally collected to £1.25 million, which generates approximately £30,000 per annum.

The fund had fallen into a state of dormancy until the Fire Brigades Union contacted the City of Edinburgh Council in 2001, which led to its reactivation. The council's pensions and trusts committee discussed the future management of the fund during 2011-12, considering how its assets might be better utilised in keeping with the spirit of its current purposes, changes in society, the effectiveness of its present constitution and engagement with key stakeholders.

On 31 January 2013, the City of Edinburgh Council agreed to promote the bill, which proposes three changes to the fund: to transfer the assets, rights and liabilities of the Surplus Fire Fund to the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Trust, which is a Scottish registered charity; to amend the purposes for which the fund can be used; and then to dissolve the fund as it is currently constituted.

Ella Simpson, the director of the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council, which is the organisation that will administer the fund under the proposals in the bill, gave evidence to the committee on its wide experience of running restricted funds and grant programmes and the large network of organisations that it works with, which could refer possible beneficiaries of the fund. She reassured the committee that the fund will be managed and awards will be apportioned across the year but that, if it cannot cover particular applications, EVOC will be able to use other funding streams at its disposal to meet the needs of the people who apply.

At present, there are few applications to the fund from private individuals, with most of the awards being made to the burns units at the Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh and St John's hospital in Livingston. The promoter explained to the committee that modernising the purposes of the fund—for example, by removing the serious injury criterion—will make it possible to make awards to those who have minor or psychological injuries.

Based on the evidence that the committee received, we support the bill's objectives and agree that a private bill is necessary and appropriate.

I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee, my fellow committee members for their robust scrutiny of the bill, and the efficient clerking team for the support that they provided to me as convener and the rest of the committee.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill be passed.

14:37

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): As a member of the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee, I am pleased to contribute to the final stage debate today, although, having listened to John Lamont and his full explanation of what the bill is all about, I am not sure that there is a great deal more for me to add.

I am struck that, when in future I speak to school groups about my experience in the Scottish Parliament, I will be able to describe the great contrasts and diversity in my job, which takes me from discussions about the future of Scotland to discussions about a statue on Leith Links, and from being convener of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee to serving on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee. There is quite a contrast in the work that we get to do.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who gave evidence to our committee, either in person or in writing. I do that today because unfortunately I was not in a position to contribute to the preliminary stage debate on 21 January. I also thank John Lamont for doing an excellent job of convening the committee, as well as my fellow committee members and the committee clerks. Of course, if the Sunday papers are anything to go by and John Lamont gets his way, he will no longer be in this place in future and he will not be in a position to convene such important and august committees of the Scottish Parliament.

I return to the bill. As we all know, it proposes a statue on Leith Links in recognition of the golfer John Rattray. During our evidence-taking sessions, I was particularly taken by the evidence that was produced by Pat Denzler, the chair of the society for the John Rattray statue. She gave us a fantastic insight into the history of Leith Links and the good reasons why John Rattray was chosen as the subject for a statue. He is a wonderful choice. As John Lamont said, he was a talented golfer and was instrumental in setting down the rules of golf, but we also learned that he was so much more. Again as John Lamont said, he was Bonnie Prince Charlie's surgeon during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, but he was also a fantastic archer who won the prestigious Edinburgh arrow on two occasions, as well as being a clan chief. He was a remarkable man and, as I noted in one of the committee's evidence sessions, his story would, given the colour of his character, make a fabulous plot for a James Robertson novel.

On a more serious note, I asked at preliminary stage for clarification of why the council had decided to proceed with a private bill rather than following the approach that was taken, for instance, for the National Galleries of Scotland extension on Princes Street. The council representatives explained that there was a restriction in existing private legislation on the construction on Leith Links of buildings, including monuments. Although certain categories of building are permitted, monuments are not, and there was no way to get round that other than by introducing primary legislation that either expressly or implicitly amended that restriction.

I am glad that the community of Leith has been so involved in the process. We heard that more than 4,000 residents were involved in the plans and attended the public information meetings that were held to inform local people. The statue will be a fantastic addition to Leith Links and will enhance the landscape and act as a reminder of the area's history.

As John Lamont described, the second part of the bill deals with the Surplus Fire Fund, and it is right that we open the fund to many more across the City of Edinburgh Council area. The bill will allow applications from those who have been affected by fire and will change the conditions that must be met to obtain financial support, and it will allow hospitals to get support for extra facilities in their burns units and so on.

All in all, the bill is a good piece of work on the committee's part. I commend those who introduced the bill, and I will support it at decision time.

14:41

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): It is slightly surreal to move on to such a debate following the preceding controversies. It is perhaps the perfect antidote, having dealt with the main controversy of the age, which Bruce Crawford introduced this afternoon: the currency in an independent Scotland. No one, as far as I know, opposes the bill that is before us, and people in my constituency welcome it.

I heard from two people on Twitter who objected to the use of public funds for the proposed strategy, but when I explained that no public funds were involved, their mild opposition dissolved. I am sure that the Parliament will unite in supporting the bill at decision time.

Although the bill is uncontroversial, John Rattray—as previous speakers have indicated—was not. I suppose that the early-18th-century political controversy that was the equivalent of the big constitutional debates of today was the question of who would be king of Scotland. John Rattray was a Jacobite as well as a surgeon, an archer and a golfer; it would be difficult to find anybody at any point in Scottish history who combines those four attributes. He is certainly an important part of Leith history, which is why people there are pleased that a statue of him will be erected.

Leith Links is an important focal point for Leith history more generally for various reasons. It can claim to be one of the first places in the world where golf was played, which certainly led to the formation of the rules of golf. The then city council—City of Edinburgh Council happens to be the bill's promoter now—offered a silver club to the winner of a golf competition on Leith Links on the condition that the rules were written down. As it happened, John Rattray won the competition, but the club was awarded only because the rules were written down, which is why the Leith Rules Golf Society exists today. Bruce Crawford mentioned Pat Denzler, and we should pay tribute to the way in which she has driven the campaign forward.

John Rattray and golf on Leith Links are an important part of Leith history. There is definitely a strong feeling in Leith about its history, as evidenced by the growing support for a museum in Leith. People have been campaigning for a museum for several years, but I have recently noticed that a much wider coalition of Leith residents is involved. I have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, who is in the chamber, on that matter more than once, most recently a few days ago.

People are very interested in Leith history, and that interest is often attached to particular locations—Leith Links, in this case, is attached to

golf. I have also been dealing recently with local concerns about The Shore, which is, of course, the historic port of the city of Edinburgh. There was a campaign for the basins of the Water of Leith to achieve scheduled monument status. Unfortunately, the idea was rejected by Historic Scotland but I am now supporting local residents who are pursuing a stronger conservation status for the area.

There is great feeling for the history of Leith and erecting a statue to John Rattray will be a small but significant part of recognising the history of Leith.

I have got 30 seconds left—20 in fact—just to say that, obviously, I support the second part of the bill and the Surplus Fire Fund. Its scope will be extended to attract more applications for grants and awards, and it will benefit a wider range of people. I certainly do not know anyone in Leith, Edinburgh or anywhere else who would object to that.

So I commend the whole bill and thank the committee for the very thorough way in which it heard the evidence and has presented its conclusions today.

14:45

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): As deputy convener of the bill committee, I am happy to close the debate. I thank those who contributed to scrutiny of the bill by providing oral and written evidence, the committee clerks for their assistance and, of course, my fellow members—John Lamont, Bruce Crawford, and Anne McTaggart—for all their help throughout proceedings on the bill. The committee convener has, helpfully, set out the background to the bill and the committee's consideration of its broad principles.

Before turning to highlight once again the benefits of the bill, I will touch briefly on a procedural aspect of the committee's work that has thus far not been covered. As well as considering the bill's general principles, private bill committees must take a view on whether a bill should proceed as a private bill. To that end, the committee had to satisfy itself that the bill conformed with the definition of a private bill in standing orders, and that the accompanying documents were adequate to allow proper scrutiny of the bill.

On the first point, the committee was satisfied that the bill complied with the standing order definition of a private bill. We were also satisfied that the bill would confer on the promoter powers in excess of the general law.

On the second point, the committee was required to consider each of the accompanying

documents—the promoter's memorandum, the explanatory notes, and the promoter's statement—and take a view on whether they were fit for purpose. For example, we considered whether the promoter's statement contained sufficient information on how consent had been gained from organisations that would be affected by the bill. The committee was of the view that, overall, the accompanying documents were adequate to allow for scrutiny of the bill.

I turn to the benefits of the bill. I thank all members for their contributions but, in particular, I thank Malcolm Chisholm for his contribution on the history of John Rattray and Leith Links and the contribution that Leith Links made to the history of golf. Malcolm Chisholm and I had a conversation about that aspect of the bill and I am sure that I will again see Mr Chisholm and his granddaughter enjoying Leith Links, and perhaps they will enjoy a game of golf.

The statue will be an attractive addition to Leith Links, it will promote an awareness of the rich history of golfing on Leith Links, and the community will benefit because the statue will attract visitors who will make use of other facilities and businesses in the area.

The Surplus Fire Fund has been touched on, and the bill will revitalise what had become a dormant fund. The changes to the purposes for which the fund can be applied will improve its use by encouraging more applications from individuals who are affected by fire, because their injuries will no longer have to be deemed to be serious; by allowing claims for damage to domestic premises and household contents from people, many of whom will not be insured—that is a welcome addition to the bill; and by expressly allowing the provision of grants to burns units that care for people who are resident in the City of Edinburgh Council area.

I should mention the transfer of the fund to EVOC, which will enable EVOC to refer to the fund organisations within the large network in which it works that EVOC believes will have a

“cumulative impact on other charitable organisations and ... individuals”.

It will also make use of the wide experience of the trustees within EVOC and ensure that the fund is used to best effect.

Each of the purposes of the bill can only provide benefits to the community and, on behalf of the committee, I am happy to recommend to Parliament that the bill be passed at decision time.

European Union Policies (Engagement and Scrutiny)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09001, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on the report "EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2014". I call Ms McKelvie to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee.

14:50

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I am delighted to speak on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee on a report that details how we and other parliamentary committees have engaged on European issues over the past year and what the priorities for EU scrutiny are for the year ahead.

I thank the committee's clerking team and our person from the Scottish Parliament information centre, who have been absolutely key to ensuring that we have been on top of all the issues, well briefed and with a good understanding of the impact of any new measures, legislation or directives coming from Europe. I also pay tribute to the committee members. On most occasions, we work extremely well together and all my colleagues on the committee seem to have a very Europhile attitude. We are committed to the benefits of Europe and how they impact on Scotland.

In reflecting on the past year, it would be remiss of me not to mention our colleague Helen Eadie, who passed away suddenly last year. Helen was a gregarious and committed member of the committee and her contributions were sometimes thoughtful, sometimes interesting and often very spunky. We could not reflect on the past year without remembering Helen's role in the committee.

The coming year looks as though it will be an extremely interesting one, with European issues at the forefront of on-going debates—and probably most debates this week. We will have the European Parliament elections in May and the appointment of a new college of commissioners over the summer. As a domestic backdrop to that, there is the small matter of an independent Scotland's membership of the European Union, which we might chat about quite a lot over the next few months as it has become a key issue in the run-up to Scotland's independence referendum in September. All in all, EU issues will be at the top of the political agenda in 2014 and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the committee as we look at them.

When I was first elected in 2011, one of my friends who is not political asked me what I would be doing. I said that I was going to chair the European committee and she asked, "Is that not dead boring?" I did not think so, and I started to explain why. Over the past two years or so, we have realised that European issues are far from boring and have an impact on our everyday life. My friend is now a bit more educated about how Europe impacts on her life as well.

Although we might not all be on the same side in the independence debate, it is clear to me that we all share the belief that it is important that the Parliament engages on European matters, as they have a direct bearing on Scotland and its domestic policies and laws. The Parliament has always believed in the importance of engaging on European matters, as is evidenced by the fact that we have a mandatory European and External Relations Committee and the fact that this annual process ensures that scrutiny of EU policies of direct relevance to Scotland is undertaken effectively. As I have said before in the chamber, all committees are European committees, and with the rapporteur system that seems to be bedding in.

Before I speak about the report in detail, I thank the committees for their individual reports on EU engagement. The responses of eight committees are annexed to our report and I am grateful for their continued engagement over the years. The reports that we received this year were particularly informative—there was a lot of very detailed work on matters affecting Scotland.

This year has seen a strengthening of our engagement on the scrutiny of EU issues and I will explain why that has been the case. We developed the scope of the process by asking committees to draw on the Europe 2020 agenda and the Scottish Government's action plan on European engagement, as well as on the European Commission's work programme, when considering EU issues that would merit further scrutiny. The Commission's work programme is an extremely useful document but, given the upcoming European elections in May and the limited time that will be available before those elections for the Parliament to consider legislative proposals, the document is less detailed this year than it usually is.

So this year, committees were asked also to consider the Europe 2020 strategy, which is the EU's strategy for boosting sustainable economic growth and creating new jobs. It is underpinned by five key targets covering employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate and energy policies. The committees were also referred to the Scottish Government's most recent national reform programme, which sets out the actions that

have been agreed to support the delivery of the Europe 2020 policies.

Lastly, the committees were invited to consider the Scottish Government's action plan on European engagement, which gives details of the Scottish Government's four priority areas in relation to EU policies. Those are energy and climate change; the marine environment, including fisheries; research and creativity; and freedom, security and justice.

I believe that the committees of the Parliament, in considering the Europe 2020 strategy and the Scottish Government's action plan on European engagement, have recognised the trend towards intergovernmental policy co-ordination in the EU and have taken a more meaningful and effective approach to EU scrutiny than one that is focused purely on EU legislative proposals.

I turn to my committee's continuing role in mainstreaming EU issues in all committees. We have a "Brussels Bulletin" at just about every meeting and there is always something in it that we refer on to another subject committee in the Parliament—we make a point of doing that.

This year, we invited other committees to evidence sessions on issues such as anti-trafficking and European funding, which we knew would be of interest to all. We also heard from the Lithuanian ambassador on Lithuania's priorities for the presidency of the European Council and from the Croatian ambassador on Croatia's path to becoming an EU member state.

We conducted work on the new programming period for the European structural and investment funds and on how the programmes will be rolled out across Scotland. Along with my colleague Maureen Watt, the convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, I travelled to Brussels with a number of EU rapporteurs to attend meetings on the revised EU public procurement directives. We tried to reflect what we learned in the work that is being done here on the Scottish Government's plans on public procurement. The directives have an impact on the Scottish Government's Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. I hope that what we learned in Brussels will help to inform some of the process in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. Any legislation from Europe has to be transposed into Scots law. I hope that we have informed the process a bit better, not just for us but for other committees.

My committee has continued to highlight European legislative proposals about which subsidiarity concerns have been raised and has fed back its views on potential improvements in the way in which such proposals are dealt with to the Standards, Procedures and Public

Appointments Committee, which is considering the standing orders under which committees deal with such issues when they arise. There has been some dubiety about how the Scottish Parliament is notified, and we raised that issue formally with the House of Lords European Union Committee as part of its inquiry into the matter.

We have taken an active interest in a number of EU issues, some of which have also been on subject committees' radars, such as EU funding, justice matters and climate change. Given that a decision on the justice and home affairs opt-out is coming soon, there has been a particular focus on that.

As members are all too aware, 2013 was the year that the multi-annual financial framework for EU-funded programmes for the next seven years to 2020 was being prepared. Our committee, along with the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, has kept a keen eye on those preparations and has asked questions on small and medium-sized enterprises and access to EU competitive funding streams.

We raised concerns about the implications of cuts to the connecting Europe facility, which covers broadband. That is a huge issue for people living in rural areas, so we have asked the Scottish Government to keep us up to date on discussions. Other committee members will certainly raise that issue, too.

I highlight the on-going work of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on the reform of the common agricultural policy and common fisheries policy. Agriculture and fisheries are always hot topics in Scotland and a number of committee members take a keen interest in them. It is reassuring that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee continues to scrutinise the key policies that directly affect the support that is available to Scotland's farmers, crofters and fishermen. I pay tribute to Jamie McGrigor, as he never misses a chance to bring up such issues in our committee and ensure that any information that we receive is fed back to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee.

As I said, justice matters have featured heavily this year, not least because of the United Kingdom's imminent 2014 opt-out decision. My committee and the Justice Committee continue to consider that matter and its implications for Scotland. I am sure that my colleague Rod Campbell, who has kept a keen eye on it, will have something to say about it later.

This year, we have built on our previous work on anti-trafficking measures, which are of particular

interest to me. The importance of eradicating the human tragedy associated with trafficking is uppermost in my mind and the minds of many other members of the Parliament. Next year, we will monitor the work of the UK interdepartmental ministerial group on human trafficking and follow the development and progress of the UK's modern slavery bill—it seems to be pretty slow, but we will follow it anyway.

Climate change has also been an area of interest and the subject of rigorous scrutiny by all four committees. That is not a surprise to me, given the ambitious climate change targets to which Scotland has signed up. I am thankful that, across the chamber, we share the view that we should take very seriously indeed tackling the impact of climate change for future generations. We need look no further than how some of our friends and family in Somerset are suffering from floods and storms, which I believe are the impact of climate change.

However, it will take effort from everyone in the Scottish Parliament if the Scottish and European 2020 climate change targets are to be achieved. Therefore, the work done by the committees on the Scottish Government's second report on proposals and policies setting out how those targets will be achieved has been invaluable.

When we went to Brussels to talk about procurement, we found that the recognition of where Scotland is at with its climate change targets and the process that it has taken to get there is extremely high. Many people wanted to speak to us about that. If we look in too much, we forget to look out and see that other people are interested in what we are doing here. We should evangelise about that a wee bit.

I am reassured that such an important area will continue to be scrutinised by our parliamentary committees.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Does Christina McKelvie agree that, having missed our first two sets of annual emissions targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, to which everybody in the Parliament agreed, we will have to go even further on specific targets and, in particular, monitor them in committees if climate change is to be mainstreamed through the committees?

Christina McKelvie: Claudia Beamish raises an important point. We have set ourselves extremely high standards, which it is the committees' role to scrutinise. That is why I have lingered a bit on climate change. We all know that we have set high standards and we need to work hard to meet them. I do not see anyone in the chamber letting up on that pressure. That is a very important issue

indeed, especially when we see what is happening around the UK right now.

So what happens next? As we end the debate, it is important to continue to prioritise our engagement with the European Union, prioritise the impact that its policies have in Scotland and scrutinise the Scottish Government on EU matters of direct relevance to Scotland's domestic policies and legislation. We will continue to do that, as I am sure all the committees will.

Although we may not all agree on how Scottish interests are best served, I am sure that we all agree that the European Union and its policies have a direct impact on the work that we do in the Parliament, so it is encouraging that, this year, we have all continued to engage on matters of direct relevance to the people of Scotland. We must continue to do so throughout the coming year. With the colleagues that I have on my committee, I have absolutely no doubt that we would do that anyway.

I hope that the Parliament finds our report informative and interesting, not boring, and I look forward to hearing discussions on EU issues of importance across all subject areas during the afternoon.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the European and External Relations Committee's 1st Report, 2014 (Session 4): *EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2014* (SP Paper 465).

15:04

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I thank the European and External Relations Committee for organising this annual debate on EU priorities. It provides an opportunity for the Government, members and committees to come together to identify points of co-operation and key areas for action.

I also thank the committee clerks for the report that they have prepared. It will be not only the basis for the debate but an invaluable point of reference on Scotland's priorities in the EU throughout the year ahead.

The work of the committee has become even more significant in the current political climate. First, the UK prime minister has given notice of his party's intention to seek to renegotiate the EU treaties, with the purpose of holding an in/out referendum on that basis. There is a real possibility, therefore, that if Scotland remains in the UK it will be removed from the EU by a future UK Government.

Secondly, of course, there is the referendum that will take place in September. That will give the Scottish electorate the chance to decide whether it should be for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to represent Scotland in the EU and its institutions, or whether that representation should remain with the Westminster Parliament and the UK Government. It is in that climate that it is more important than ever that the Scottish Parliament considers not only its priority areas for influencing the development of EU law and policy, but also the means by which it influences them.

I will start, however, by addressing the comments that were made by Mr Barroso, the president of the European Commission, at the weekend. First, Mr Barroso recognised the democratic right of the people of Scotland to determine their own future. Secondly, Mr Barroso indicated that, in continuing as a member of the EU, an independent Scotland would require the approval of all member states. The Scottish Government has set out its preferred route for Scotland to continue as a member of the EU, through a treaty amendment under article 48 of the Treaty on European Union. As we have already stressed, that requires the consent of all the other member states.

That leads me to Mr Barroso's third point, in which he implied some impossibility about the process of Scotland continuing as a member. Bear it in mind that the expansionist EU accepted East Germany almost overnight and has accepted 16 further member states through the enlargement process since 1990, with the negotiations in the cases of Finland, Sweden and Denmark lasting only a matter of months. An independent Scotland will not be a new country that has never been a part of the EU. We need to be clear: Scotland and its citizens have been an integral part of the EU for 40 years and our situation cannot be compared with any states that have never been a part of the EU. All the member states recognise the contribution that Scotland has made to the EU during that period.

Mr Barroso himself has defined the values of the European Union as freedom, democracy, the rule of law and solidarity. When the people of Scotland vote in the independence referendum, they will be exercising their democratic freedom in a consensual, legal process. In the event of a yes vote, is anyone seriously suggesting that the EU would abandon its founding principles and seek to remove 5 million EU citizens against their will?

I am not surprised, therefore, that the Commission has now sought to clarify Mr Barroso's comments. The bottom line is that the European Union is founded on democracy, and Mr

Barroso's comments on Scotland fundamentally undermine the founding pillars of the EU.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I am interested to hear the minister's comments on Mr Barroso's comments. Following her remark about the EU being a democracy, if other European citizens, along with Mr Barroso, believe that Scotland should no longer be part of the Schengen agreement, would the cabinet secretary believe that Scotland should still be a member of the EU?

Fiona Hyslop: With regard to Scotland's proposals, in terms of the continuity of effect, there is no detriment. Given the points on which the EU is based, the respect for the democratic decision of the people of Scotland will be paramount. That reflects the comments that have been made by member states so far. It is important to remember that it is the member states that have the focus in this area. A greater study of article 48 would be useful for the member.

I have today published a paper entitled "Scotland's Priorities for EU Reform", which follows on from our engagement with the UK Government's review of the balance of competences between the EU and the UK. Our review of the exercise of EU competence has demonstrated just how deeply integrated Scotland is in the EU. As well as benefiting enormously from being a part of the EU, Scotland makes a significant contribution to the EU in terms of finance, economic growth, industry, education and innovation as well as social justice. Scotland is an integral part of the single market. It is seriously wrong to think that that would be broken up simply because an existing nation within its membership chooses to follow a democratic process and govern its own affairs. The simple fact is that it is in everyone's interests, throughout the whole of the EU, for the people of Scotland to remain a part of the EU. This is the reality of the situation.

Our paper also highlights the importance, more than ever, of Scotland being in a position to influence the development of EU law and policy. That is why it identifies a number of priority areas in which Scotland should seek to influence the reform of EU law and policy from within the existing framework of the EU treaties and institutions. Unlike the UK Prime Minister, I do not consider that a complete renegotiation of the EU treaties is necessary in order to achieve the necessary reforms.

I will focus on some of the issues that were highlighted in the committee's report on EU priorities, which echo the conclusions of our examination of the exercise of EU competences and again demonstrate the importance of the EU to Scotland, as well as Scotland to the EU. The report also demonstrates how we are all working

constructively within the current constitutional settlement to ensure that Scotland's priorities are taken into account. As a starting point, it is clear that the new round of European structural and competitive funding will play a major role in helping us to tie together better skills and business development, to commercialise our world-class research base and to support major infrastructure projects.

I am grateful to all the committees that have played a role in making the acquisition of structural and competitive funding one of their key priorities for 2014. The Scottish Government played a key part in securing £1.3 billion of EU funding between 2007 and 2013 and shares the committees' ambitions to draw down even more funding at this crucial juncture: the year of a new European Commission and a new European Parliament.

We are pleased that the Commission work programme for 2014 continues to prioritise our young peoples' futures. The £50 million youth employment Scotland fund is made up of £15 million from the Scottish Government and £10 million from the European social fund, matched by £25 million-worth of in-kind support from employers and local councils. Up to 10,000 young people are expected to be supported into work. It is a case in point of what can be achieved when Government, local government, the Parliament and the European institutions work together.

I highlight the positive focus on Scotland's economic future post-2014. The committees' work on the economic benefits of membership of international institutions will be greatly valued and demonstrates the importance of Scotland's position in the EU: 46 per cent of our international exports go to EU member states, which equates to £11 billion of Scottish exports. Scotland is also a growing part of the European economy. Since 2006, the value of Scottish exports to the EU has increased by 35.1 per cent. We are concerned, however, that Europe will not be able to achieve the reforms necessary to increase economic growth unless it can also demonstrate that those gains lead to a fitter, more equal, more inclusive society.

I also acknowledge the work of the committees in relation to social issues. E-health continues to be a source of European co-operation. The first European telemedicine conference, held in Edinburgh last October, demonstrates the key role that Scotland plays in that field.

Work identified in committees of the Parliament also highlights the importance of EU action on the issue of the Roma community.

We have recently published an update of the annexes to our action plan for engagement with

the EU on our four key areas: energy and climate change, which was referred to by Christina McKelvie; the marine environment; research and creativity; and freedom, security and justice.

We are also keeping a very close eye on how recent reforms of the common agricultural and fisheries policies will work in practice.

We have worked constructively with the UK Government in seeking to ensure that Scotland's priorities are communicated in the EU institutions. The Scottish ministers have been active in attending meetings of the council of ministers relating to their policy areas. Frustratingly, however, our ministers are still not able to secure speaking rights in some councils that fall into our priority areas.

The Scottish Government is committed to doing all it can in all our priority areas, but we are mindful that our sphere of influence is limited, as it is the UK Government's role to represent Scotland before the EU institutions. Depending on the outcome of the next UK parliamentary election, the UK Government may be pursuing a very separate agenda to renegotiate the treaties. That is why I am so keen for Scotland to play a direct role in the development of EU law and policy as an independent member state.

In the white paper, "Scotland's Future", the Government set out the process by which an independent Scotland could smoothly become an independent member state within the EU, participating fully in the EU institutions and playing a key role in the development of EU law and policy. Just think of the impact that an independent Scotland, speaking with its own voice in the EU institutions, could have. States of a similar and smaller size than Scotland already play a significant role in the EU. During my visit to Denmark last year, I was struck by that country's confidence on the international stage.

The Scandinavian member states are the paradigm example of that, but there are many other member states that actively influence the direction in which the EU is travelling. The three previous EU presidencies—Cyprus, Ireland and Lithuania—were all held by countries smaller in size and population than Scotland. We were very impressed by the recent Lithuanian presidency: the multi-annual financial framework legislative package was approved, significant progress on the banking union was made, and two and a half times more legal documents than the average were agreed. Moreover, the presidency's calm stewardship in a time of political unease showed the positive impact that smaller states can have on the international stage.

The Scottish Government therefore shares the interest that the European and External Relations

Committee showed in similar-sized states in its evidence session two weeks ago. There will be plenty of opportunities for further engagement, for example with Latvia and Luxembourg, which have far smaller populations than Scotland and will each hold the EU presidency in 2015.

This debate is an excellent opportunity to put on the record the strong contribution that Scotland's Parliament, as well as Scotland's Government, is making to Europe's future. However, the current constitutional settlement in the UK means that Scotland does not have its own voice in the major EU institutions. Just imagine what we could actively influence in relation to the priorities highlighted by the committee's report if we had the means to do so. Do we want to influence positively the direction of the EU or are we content for the current UK Prime Minister to increase our isolation from the rest of the continent? That is the choice between the two futures facing Scotland.

15:15

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I thank Christina McKelvie, the convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for her very kind words about our late colleague Helen Eadie. Helen Eadie was indeed a committed European and a committed socialist. Her view of Europe was about the opportunities that it afforded her and others like her to improve the lot of the people of Fife, the people of Scotland and, of course, the people of the UK. She was committed to that and I think that her legacy will live on for a very long time indeed. It is quite strange to be debating Europe and not to have Helen Eadie sitting up at the back ready to pounce if one of us were to get something wrong.

There is absolutely no doubt that this Parliament takes issues relating to the European Union very seriously. That assertion is demonstrated by the fact that the European and External Relations Committee is a mandatory committee of the Parliament, as the convener said. So wide reaching is the impact of the European Union that the issues that it discusses and the policies that it adopts must be of interest and importance to all the committees of this Parliament. That is why a report such as the one that we are debating today is vital, gathering together as it does the actions of all the Parliament's committees and distilling them into one document.

However, like all the other committees of the Parliament, the European and External Relations Committee is also responsible for scrutinising the work of the Scottish Government, in particular its external engagement and, in the context of this report, its engagement with the European Union. It is fair to say that the way in which the committee gathers together that information has improved

over time and it is something that we hope will further evolve so that a recognition of the importance of the EU to domestic policy and legislation can be fully integrated into the work of all the Parliament's committees.

That process began in 2010 when the Parliament agreed to introduce a Parliament-wide strategy for EU engagement and scrutiny. At that time, we also agreed, as a Parliament, that that should be done by adopting an early engagement approach in order to mainstream the scrutiny of draft EU legislation and the monitoring of the transposition and implementation of legislation into the work of subject committees.

As the convener has already said, this year's approach developed that way of working further by asking subject committees to look at both the work that they have done and the plans that they have for the coming year, so that the Parliament can take a more strategic approach. That is particularly important in relation to the work that most committees will want to do on the Europe 2020 strategy and the Scottish Government's action plan on European engagement. I think that that is the right approach and I very much hope that the subject committees have found it useful to their work, too.

Of course, all our discussions in this area must take place against the backdrop of the European elections, which take place in May. The European Commission's work plan understandably focuses on legislative proposals that have already been announced and which are likely to be agreed before the elections take place. The work plan identifies access to finance, the banking union, the single market and the digital agenda as priorities and considers the multi-annual financial framework for 2014 to 2020 to be of real importance in ensuring that organisations and businesses can benefit from investment and European programmes without unnecessary delay.

However, the Parliament must also look at the way in which the Scottish Government engages with and relates to the EU. I was perhaps not going to mention this in today's debate, but, given that the cabinet secretary spent more than half of her speech talking about Mr Barroso and issues concerning an independent Scotland's membership of the EU, I make no excuse for now turning to that area.

The European and External Relations Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the nature of an independent Scotland's relationship with Europe, but I had thought that that would be a debate for another day. However, the issue has been raised, so I take the opportunity to urge the Scottish Government to be more frank with Parliament before we conclude our inquiry and to

tell us once and for all what legal advice it has about Scotland's membership of the European Union; until now, it has suggested that that is not in the public interest. If that issue is not in the public interest, what would be?

Fiona Hyslop: The member will recall the answer that she gave to Parliament about the publication of legal advice when she was a minister, which was that Governments do not recognise such requests or issue the content of legal advice.

Patricia Ferguson: I absolutely accept that, but I suggest to the cabinet secretary that the context is entirely different.

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): It is one rule for Labour and another rule for us.

Patricia Ferguson: No. We are being asked to make what the Scottish Government would argue is a once-in-a-lifetime—or even a once-in-300-years—decision. That decision is of prime importance to the everyday lives of the people of this country. On that basis, the Scottish Government must think about this and publish the legal advice. Anyone who tries to excuse the Government by citing previous examples as Ms Hyslop has tried to do underestimates the power of the particular question that we are discussing.

Today, we have learned that membership of the euro is a red-line issue for any negotiations. We need to know what other red lines there might be. For example, would the rate of VAT be a red-line issue? Those are the matters that the people of Scotland want to know about. If the Government will not tell us what its legal advice is, perhaps it will tell us what its red-line areas are for negotiation. That is not too much to ask.

As a Parliament, we need to consider the information that is gathered and the work that is done by the subject committees. It is very interesting to read about that work. We also want to measure that work against the areas that the Scottish Government has identified as its priorities. Those priority areas are listed on page 4 of the European and External Relations Committee's report and comprise energy and climate change, marine environment, research and creativity, and freedom, security and justice.

In a debate such as this, it is always difficult to cover all the many issues that one would wish to—I will return in my closing speech to many of the specific issues that have been identified by other subject committees—but there are a number of areas that I think are worth flagging up. The first of those areas is EU funding, which we know can be difficult to access. It is the Scottish Government's responsibility to take whatever steps it can to assist, particularly in those areas, such as

structural, cohesion, rural development and fisheries funds, in which the money is allocated directly to Scotland. The scrutiny of subject committees in that regard is particularly important.

Another area that has attracted the particular interest of the European and External Relations Committee is, as the convener rightly identified, the digital agenda; that interest is shared with the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, particularly with regard to connection to rural areas but also for those parts of our towns and cities where access can be difficult.

Trafficking is one issue that particularly engages my party and I know that the committee's convener shares our concerns about how trafficking will be prevented, particularly this year. I very much hope that the Scottish Government will agree to back Jenny Marra's bill on the subject, which has garnered cross-party support and was introduced today.

As I mentioned, I want to cover many other issues. I look forward to returning to those at the end of the debate.

15:24

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): With great respect to the cabinet secretary, given that she has mentioned this I hope that members will forgive me for opening with a reference to the most definitive statement yet given on Scotland's membership of the EU should she separate from the rest of the UK family. I make no apology for drawing attention to José Manuel Barroso's comments on Sunday, when he said categorically, on television, that our position in the EU could not be guaranteed following a vote for separatism—

"extremely difficult, if not impossible"

were his words.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie McGrigor: No, I will go on for a bit.

José Manuel Barroso has not only been Prime Minister of Portugal but has served two terms as President of the European Commission. I think that everyone would agree that he is a man of considerable consequence. Surely he is worth listening to.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie McGrigor: I do not think that I will do so at this point.

President Barroso is consistent on the matter, as was his predecessor, Romano Prodi, who said as long ago as 2004 that an independent Scotland would not automatically be a member of the EU. The arguments will continue and I relish the opportunity of crossing swords with the committee convener, the cabinet secretary and Scottish National Party committee members on that crucial point.

Chic Brodie: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie McGrigor: Not at the moment.

Our inquiry into EU membership and recent statements seem to be exposing the myths that are perpetuated by the people who argue that we can expect a warm welcome from all our European partners and all will be well on the night. According to leading experts, all will not be well on the night.

Today's debate draws attention to the European and External Relations Committee report on EU engagement and how committees of this Parliament interact with EU policies. That might sound a bit dull, but the committee, of which I am a member, provides a useful function in scrutinising what comes out of Europe and how it relates to our business in a devolved Parliament.

I thank the convener and the clerks for their extremely hard work in preparing the report, and I thank the Parliament's other committees for their diligence in identifying what should be our priorities in EU matters. I recognise that all the Parliament's committees have busy work programmes; it is commendable that they have found time to consider issues that are relevant to domestic policies and legislation.

At the heart of the report is an emphasis on the commitment that the Scottish Parliament made in 2010, that there should be a focus on European affairs. During my time on the committee we have demonstrated our success in scrutinising the Scottish Government's approach in EU matters. I am sure that the cabinet secretary acknowledges the key role that we have played in holding the Scottish Government to account—that is no bad thing when one considers recent developments.

I have argued consistently that although the four areas of particular interest to the Scottish Government—energy and climate change, marine environment including fisheries, research and creativity, and freedom, security and justice—are of critical importance, there is room for a degree of expansion. In particular, agriculture, farming and food production are crucial spheres that we cannot ignore. I once again implore the cabinet secretary to explain why those areas are not identified as being of huge significance.

The report highlights the Scottish ministers' attendance at various committee meetings to contribute to discussions on EU issues that have an impact on domestic affairs, such as the Scottish Government's budget. The Parliament's committees have also hosted a range of specialist guests. For example Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, met the Local Government and Regeneration Committee in September last year. I understand that a range of issues was raised, such as changes to EU structural and investment funds and revisions to EU procurement directives, which are crucial areas for Scotland.

The importance of the European and External Relations Committee was demonstrated by the attendance at meetings in October 2013 of the Lithuanian ambassador and the Croatian ambassador—the latter coming soon after Croatia's accession to the EU. We look forward to next month's evidence session with the Greek ambassador.

Our committee investigated developments in CFP and CAP reforms and those investigations were further augmented by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's evidence sessions with MEPs, Owen Paterson from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Richard Lochhead.

Where I must depart from the normal approach that is taken in committee debates is with reference to the document "Scotland's Priorities for EU Reform", which landed on my desk at 9 o'clock this morning. What seems to me to be a very hastily cobbled-together piece of work is perhaps one of the most biased Scottish Government publications that I have ever seen, and I can only imagine that it was drafted as a direct response to recent statements coming from the EU, including that from the President of the Commission.

Fiona Hyslop: I should make it clear to the member that at the moment we are in the second semester and are moving into the third semester. We have been preparing our input to the process and, indeed, have already published our first semester responses. This work has been on-going for months and months and I think that this very opportune debate ensures that we can align the Parliament's EU priorities with the Government's. It is the correct thing to do.

Jamie McGrigor: I look forward to reading the document in more detail but, quite frankly, it looks as though the Government is clutching at straws to justify its weak arguments for independence. It demeans itself by putting out such a document at such a late stage when we should have been highlighting the committee's work, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will reflect on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate and I call Willie Coffey, to be followed by David Stewart. Mr Coffey, we have quite a bit of time in hand, so you can have up to seven minutes or thereby.

15:31

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The extremely good move by the Parliament to mainstream the consideration of European issues in our committees has allowed European issues to reach a wider audience of members right across the Parliament and has brought European affairs very much into sharper focus here in Scotland. As the breadth and depth of the committees' contributions make clear, they have embraced the role very positively and are making a valued contribution to the work of the Parliament. We are certainly indebted to all of our colleagues for their work.

Of course, the focus for much of the work of the European and External Relations Committee is the Commission's work programme and its impact on Scotland, and the Scottish Government's action plan for European engagement and the national reform programme allow us to scrutinise the Scottish Government's work in support of the objectives set out in Europe 2020. As the committee convener has said, we have covered quite a variety of subjects and have had several important visits to our committee, with some impressive contributions along the way. I want to pick out a few themes that are of particular interest to me and share some of our committees' input on those matters.

One key theme is the digital agenda and how Europe is taking forward the roll-out of superfast broadband. It came as a bit of a shock to me and, indeed, to my late colleague Helen Eadie to discover that one of the casualties in the cuts to the MAFF agreement requested by the UK Government was the proposed spend on information technology infrastructure projects, which was to be cut significantly. The impact of that is yet to be determined but the consequent proposal to shift the focus more towards IT service provision and away from underlying infrastructure must surely hold back the speed of progress in reaching out to Europe's rural and excluded communities. I note that the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee also took an interest in that issue. Although it came at the issue more from the perspective of state-aid guidelines, it nevertheless shows that our committees now have a keen interest in the digital agenda.

That said, I am much more encouraged by announcements that have been made here in Scotland to invest further in superfast broadband programmes with a target to deliver 30 megabits

per second everywhere by 2020. I also note that we are to receive a visit from the Commission's director-general for communications networks, content and technology and I am sure that members will be keen to take advantage of that opportunity when it comes up.

There can surely be no greater scourge for any country than to have high levels of youth unemployment. Scotland is the only EU country to have a dedicated Minister for Youth Employment and although our youth unemployment rates have dropped since that role was introduced, from about 25 to 19 per cent, in Spain the rate of youth unemployment is an incredible 57 per cent—surely a major cause for concern for that country. It was therefore with great interest that the committee noted the Scottish Government proposal to deploy the European social fund and European regional development fund moneys and other youth employability measures to tackle the issue further. In Scotland, an additional €52 million will be targeted at youth unemployment black spots, particularly in the west of Scotland. That is very welcome indeed.

If there is an issue on which Europe could and should co-operate, it is surely the issue of how we tackle human trafficking. Modern-day slavery is alive and kicking, even here in Scotland. The committee heard from the EU's anti-trafficking co-ordinator, Myria Vassiliadou, who painted a disturbing picture for us of the extent of human trafficking throughout Europe.

I know that the cabinet secretary is keeping a close eye on the UK's modern slavery bill to see how Scotland might apply it here. The full force of the law must be brought to bear on those criminals who exploit their fellow human beings under the most degrading of circumstances and, in my view, a similar warning must go out to those who buy those services from the criminals who supply them.

We have heard some discussion about the Scottish Government white paper; the committee evidence sessions on the paper have been fairly robust. Differing opinions have been offered, of course, on Scotland's continuing EU membership after independence. I have still to hear from anyone who has given evidence by what mechanism Scotland would suddenly find itself outside the European Union after independence. I asked two learned Queen's counsel and a professor that specific question but none of them could point to any specific clause within the treaties that would bring that about.

For me, and for several of those who gave evidence, the pragmatic, co-operative and inclusive approach that is Europe's hallmark will ensure that Scotland is a member of the EU on the first day of independence.

Ken Macintosh: I recognise what Mr Coffey says but what does he make of President Barroso's remarks? Surely President Barroso is a moderate and well-intentioned spokesperson. Was he not accurate in his comments?

Willie Coffey: If I had the opportunity, I would ask President Barroso the same question that I asked those committee witnesses—I would ask him to point to exactly which clause in the treaty would achieve the effect that he claims. No one has been able to do that. I invite any members to tell me which clause it is right now. Tell me—is there a clause that would do that? Will Mr Macintosh tell me which clause would exclude Scotland?

Ken Macintosh: Is Mr Coffey saying that Mr Barroso is making it up in that case?

Willie Coffey: If he cannot answer the question about which clause within existing treaties would take Scotland out—

Ken Macintosh: If Mr Coffey cannot answer my question—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please, Mr Macintosh.

Willie Coffey: It is the no campaigners who are claiming that that would happen, so I think that they have to demonstrate which clause in the treaty would achieve that effect.

European business is playing an increasing role in the work of the Scottish Government and in the work of the Parliament through our committees. The Government action plan on European engagement, the national reform programme and the work of our committees show that Scotland is engaging positively and in greater depth on European issues.

The visits and the planned visits by the ambassadors of those countries holding the presidency of the Council will give us a wonderful opportunity to hear directly about how they see Europe developing and the role that Scotland will play in that development. Through all that work comes the benefit of adding to our own expertise; there is a reciprocal benefit to our European colleagues as we bring them a Scottish perspective on the work of the European Union.

We have much to gain but much to offer and it is all great preparation for things to come. I am happy to support the motion in the name of the convener.

15:39

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As other members have done, I thank the convener and the members of the European and External Relations Committee for a very well

prepared and informative report, which outlines a range of issues that relate to EU engagement and scrutiny.

At the outset, I echo Patricia Ferguson's thanks to the committee's convener for her kind comments about the late Helen Eadie. We all recognise the tremendous knowledge of European affairs that Helen had. I also echo what Patricia Ferguson said about Helen Eadie's great experience. I remember her telling me when I first entered Parliament about how she had worked for some time with Jim Callaghan at No 10. Hers was some CV, which went back a number of years. She had tremendous experience and tremendous expertise.

The conclusion of the committee's report highlights the importance and relevance of EU issues and work to domestic policies and legislation. I would like to focus my remarks—just for a change, some might say—on the importance of the EU funding that has been allocated to Scotland through the European regional development fund, the European social fund and the rural development and fisheries funding. I want to focus, in particular, on the Highlands and Islands, for obvious reasons.

As I have said several times in similar debates over the years, and as Jamie McGrigor said earlier, those funds have had an extremely positive impact on my region, and considerable investment has been made in the area's infrastructure. As members will know, since the 1990s, when the region qualified for enhanced funding through objective 1, the funds have made a significant contribution to stimulating economic development in the Highlands and Islands. They are—perhaps controversially—designed to increase GDP relative to that of the rest of the UK and the rest of Europe. The long-term plan must be to develop GDP in the region so that it does not need European structural funds. I accept that we are some way from that.

Chic Brodie: Is not it the case that we have been denied the huge benefits that we know are available through the horizon fund and the COSME fund because we have had limited interface with Europe? Highlands and Islands Enterprise is one of the agencies that has been involved. Should not we try to increase the number of accredited organisations in order that we can optimise the benefits that we have been denied because we are not a member state?

David Stewart: I will come back to entitlement later, if Chic Brodie can live with that. He has made a good point, but my overall view is that we should look to maximise access to any funding to which Scotland as a whole, and not just the Highlands and Islands, is entitled.

I note the committee's commitment to undertake fact-finding visits to programmes across Scotland that are funded by EU structural and investment funds. I invite the convener to consider a visit to the Highlands and Islands as part of the committee's work programme, if she has not already considered that. She will know that there are many excellent examples of the difference that that funding makes to businesses, communities and individuals. A couple of examples near where I live are the Kessock bridge and the Mallaig road. Coupled with domestic funding, ESIF made those projects happen.

Previous structural fund investment has made a positive contribution to the region. I will give a bit of history. The structural funds programme that ran between 2000 and 2006 created or retained 17,000 jobs, assisted more than 9,000 businesses and supported 11,000 trainees. However, there are huge challenges in the Highlands and Islands because of the area's demanding geography—it can be argued that there is not much that can be done about that—its sparse population and its acute peripherality.

Members will know that the Highlands and Islands covers a third of Scotland's landmass—an area that is larger than Belgium, but which has a population that is smaller than that of Brussels. Its geography is demanding: it has a coastline that is longer than Brazil's and it includes more than 100 inhabited islands.

We all know that depopulation has been a running sore in the Highlands and Islands—particularly the islands—and what I would describe as the supersparse mainland parts of the region. As we approach the new programme period, which will run from 2014 until 2020, the Highlands and Islands, with GDP that is 84 per cent of the EU average, again qualifies—rightly, in my view—for special treatment as a transition region. That is likely to amount to some €172 million of ring-fenced funding out of a total Scottish allocation of about €795 million.

I believe that the EU 2020 goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth are as relevant to the Highlands and Islands as they are to the rest of Scotland, but the distinct challenges—and, indeed opportunities—for the Highlands and Islands that are integral to the area's designation as a transition region must be addressed directly by building on progress that was made through previous structural funds investment.

Does the convener agree that the proposed integrated territorial investment—the ITI approach—which is a mechanism to integrate, manage and deliver the European structural and investment funds in a distinct geographic area, represents the best way forward? It ensures that regional stakeholders have a say in how European

structural funds can be targeted to meet the specific challenges and opportunities for the Highlands and Islands.

Jamie McGrigor: I commend David Stewart for what he is saying, because I agree with it. Does he agree that the structural funds that went into the Bernera and Eriskay causeways and the Scalpay bridge have made enormous differences to those islands? I have never heard anybody there say "We wish we were still an island."

David Stewart: Jamie McGrigor is quite right to say that we should be targeting the particular problems in our island communities. Another example is depopulation in the Western Isles, about which I have real concerns. Any work that could be done to stimulate economic development and keep our young people on the islands is crucial. I agree that we should be targeting our island communities because of their distinct problems. I believe that the ITI will allow for structural funding to be targeted at the same strategic priorities as the rest of Scotland but with sufficient flexibility to ensure that the funds address the specifics of the individual regions.

The allocation of funding is important and I believe that we had quite a success in that allocation, because the UK Government—I do not praise it often—announced that it planned to use its own formula to allocate structural funds rather than the formula that had been decided by the EU, which meant that Scotland received more structural funding than it would have done under the existing formula. It is an uplift of around €228 million, which ensured that the four nations of the UK suffered roughly the same cut—of about 5 per cent—in overall funding.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

David Stewart: I think that I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I think that the member has just concluded. Are you finished, Mr Stewart?

David Stewart: If I have time, I will give way to the cabinet secretary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes—you can.

Fiona Hyslop: Mr Stewart made a very important point. Will he acknowledge the role of Scottish Government ministers in arguing that point and that, across the chamber, there has been a very strong argument from the Scottish Parliament that the issue had to be addressed?

David Stewart: If there is still time, Presiding Officer, I will raise an issue that members have not raised that concerns me. I am sure that the convener is aware of the matter. I was concerned

to find out that Liverpool City Council and Sheffield City Council challenged the allocation through the High Court, which recently ruled that the cuts in European funding were unlawful. It is not clear whether or how that court judgment will affect the allocation of structural funds in England or across the UK for the next programme. However, I believe that the overall programme that we got for Scotland was a victory from which we should take comfort.

My overall view is that European funding is not a paternalistic sop from Eurocrats but a crucial economic tool to lever up to the EU average the per capita GDP of lagging regions. It provides planning and economic opportunities to exploit emerging markets such as life sciences, renewable energy and the creative industries. I am sure that the minister shares my view that transition region status is an important economic tool in overcoming natural handicaps and allowing the region to work with the rest of Scotland in contributing to the EU 2020 goals of promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the EU economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Roderick Campbell, to be followed by Stewart Maxwell. I can give members around seven minutes, with a bit of leeway for interventions.

15:48

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): As the Justice Committee's EU rapporteur, I am pleased to be speaking in this debate about the committee's EU engagement last year and in 2014. The committee's EU priorities for 2013 remain broadly the same for 2014, as they continue to be significant issues with major implications for Scotland. The first is probably the most significant: the UK Government's 2014 opt-out decision. Protocol 36 of the Lisbon treaty allows the UK Government to decide by 1 May 2014 whether the UK should continue to be bound by about 130 police and criminal justice measures that were adopted prior to the Lisbon treaty, or exercise its right to opt out of them all. Either scenario would be required to take effect from 1 December 2014.

The committee's interest in the issue began in October 2012, when the Home Secretary announced at Westminster that the UK Government was likely to exercise the block opt-out. That announcement prompted interest in the House of Lords, which set up the European Union Select Committee to inquire into the opt-out decision. I am pleased to say that in its inquiry the EU Select Committee took account of Scottish interests, hearing evidence from the Lord Advocate and receiving written evidence from the Faculty of Advocates, the Law Society of Scotland

and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland.

One of the main concerns was that the block opt-out would include the European arrest warrant, which is a key tool for Scottish prosecutors and police to facilitate arrests across member states. Given the work that was being undertaken down south by that committee, we agreed not to conduct our own inquiry at that time.

The House of Lords reported in April 2013 that the UK Government had not made a convincing case for opting out of the 130 measures and that doing so would have negative repercussions for the UK's internal security. The Scottish Government agreed with that position. Despite that, however, the UK Government agreed in July 2013—when the Scottish Parliament was in recess—to proceed with the opt-out, and it is negotiating to opt back into 35 individual measures, despite criticism from the House of Lords in October 2013 about the explanation for the choice of those measures.

Concerns remain about the 35 measures that have been identified, and there could be implications if the individual opt-ins are not negotiated by the time the block opt-out comes into effect on 1 December. Further debates on the issue are planned at Westminster. Such is its significance that, on 4 March, the Justice Committee will take evidence from the Scottish Government on the implications for Scotland if the UK Government only opts in to 35 of the 130 original measures. To inform that evidence session, we have sought views from the Faculty of Advocates, the Law Society of Scotland, the Lord Advocate and Police Scotland. We look forward to an interesting meeting on 4 March. We also have the option to hold a chamber debate in May, so we will monitor progress.

Our second EU priority is the proposal to establish a European public prosecutor's office to focus on protecting the financial interests of the European Union. In September last year, the Justice Committee agreed that that does not comply with the subsidiarity principle. That decision led to a committee motion on the subsidiarity breach being debated and agreed to by this Parliament for the first time.

A large number of member states submitted reasoned opinions against the proposal, which triggered a yellow-card procedure and required the Commission to review the proposal and to decide whether to retain, amend or withdraw it. No doubt members know that the Commission has decided to proceed with the proposal without amendment. The UK Government does not intend to opt in to the proposal; however, if the EPPO is established, there may be implications for Scotland and the UK

in terms of co-operating with it, so the committee will continue to monitor developments closely.

The Commission work programmes for 2012 and 2013 both included a proposal on special safeguards in criminal procedures for suspects or accused persons who are vulnerable, and in both years the committee agreed to include the proposal in its EU priorities. Late last year, the Commission published a recommendation on the issue, which prompted the Justice Committee to seek the Scottish Government's views on how the recommendation fits in with the provisions in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which the Parliament is currently considering. The Scottish Government's response confirmed that the provisions in the bill

"go some way towards ensuring we comply with the spirit of the Recommendation",

but that further thought would be given to the issue. That means that the Justice Committee will continue to monitor the issue. There is a 36-month period in which to inform the Commission of measures that have been taken to give effect to the recommendation. As I said, the committee has therefore agreed to continue to monitor the Scottish Government's progress towards meeting the recommendation.

I have a little time in hand, so I turn to Ken Macintosh's comments about the opinions of Barroso and Van Rompuy. I refer to the European and External Relations Committee's evidence-taking session on 23 January and the evidence that Sir David Edward gave on the point. He is very much a proponent of negotiations. He said:

"There will be a gap in time between the vote and the moment of independence. In that period of time, you will have an obligation to negotiate a solution to the problem"—

that problem being the absurd situation of EU citizens suddenly, on independence, being thrust out into a cold world. He continued:

"That has been ignored by Barroso, Van Rompuy and all those who talk about it.

My belief is that you could mount a case before the European Court of Justice ... Am I going to lose my rights at the moment of independence? I do not know what the answer will be, but I am prepared to bet that it will not be the Van Rompuy answer."—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 23 January 2014; c 1705-6.]

I say to Mr Macintosh, "There is your answer." Sir David Edward, at least, thinks that Barroso and Van Rompuy are wrong, and even protagonists who believe that article 49 should prevail, including Professor Armstrong in the committee on that day, take the view that negotiations should take place following a yes vote and that we should avoid a situation in which a complete impasse occurs between there being a yes vote and independence.

Ken Macintosh: I accept Mr Campbell's argument that experts take different views. Will he accept the contention that Mr Barroso could be right?

Roderick Campbell: I have already given my view. Mr Barroso is currently a civil servant and a member of the European Commission. His—and the Commission's—role is consultation. He is not a decision maker, and he will be out of office shortly. I always like to pay some respect to someone who has been in their job for a while, but it seems from the press comment overnight that he recognises that his most recent comments might have been a little hasty.

15:55

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Education and Culture Committee and the European Union's Committee of the Regions, I am acutely aware of how Parliament's policy priorities often overlap with those of Europe. It is therefore entirely appropriate for us to consider ways to improve our relationship with European policy priorities and to look at how we can better scrutinise and engage with the European Union.

The Education and Culture Committee has already incorporated consideration of EU issues on a number of topics in its recent work. We have, for example, taken evidence from witnesses including the chief executive of Creative Scotland on the possibility of applying for European structural funds for film making in Scotland, because such funding has already been successfully allocated to other parts of the UK.

The committee has also scrutinised the Scottish Government's budget for 2014-15 and asked the Government what progress is being made in accessing structural funding for youth employability and job creation, which were key policy priorities of the Lithuanian presidency of the Council of Europe.

Our work programme for the coming year includes consideration of the European Union's Europe 2020 policy strategy and the Scottish Government's response to it. The Scottish Parliament's work on the education attainment gap could tie in well with the Europe 2020 headline targets for improving education levels and the youth guarantee scheme that ensures education, training or employment opportunities for all 16 to 24-year-olds.

The Education and Culture Committee also expects to consider aspects of foreign language teaching. That work could combine aspects of the European and External Relations Committee's recent inquiry into foreign language learning in primary schools. The Scottish Government has

developed policies in that area, and I understand that it will provide updates to the EERC every six months. As our committees work through their programmes, each committee's EU rapporteur will assist by continuing to look for opportunities to highlight relevant EU issues and to raise those issues, as and when that is appropriate.

The objectives that are set out in the Europe 2020 strategy are strongly supported by the Scottish Government through its national reform programme, and I welcome any measures that will help to accelerate economic recovery and continue our strong commitment to the education of our young people. The national reform programme accurately describes education as being central to our future economic growth. Measures such as free education, maintaining the education maintenance allowance and providing financial support measures to students will prove to be vital in meeting European objectives and in ensuring that Scotland continues to have a competitive economy.

The Scottish national reform programme highlights that Scotland is on track to meet the education objectives that are listed in the Europe 2020 strategy. The first is the aim of reducing the rate of early school leavers from 15 per cent to 10 per cent by 2020. By 2012 we had already reduced that figure to 13 per cent, and I am pleased to note that the number of young people who are staying in employment, education or training after leaving school is the highest on record, with figures from 2013 showing that 89 per cent of school leavers are still in positive destinations nine months after leaving school. Furthermore, the percentage of school leavers who attain a qualification at higher grade or above has increased, while the rate of those who are leaving school with no qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 3 fell to a record low of 1.7 per cent in 2011-12.

Secondly, Scotland is already meeting the European objective of ensuring by 2020 that at least 40 per cent of 30 to 34-year-olds have a tertiary education. In 2012, 54 per cent of that age group already had education up to tertiary level. Those figures show that Scotland is progressing well in offering education and training when our progress is viewed in a European context.

I look forward to reviewing our Europe 2020 objectives further to our upcoming committee work. I genuinely believe that Scotland can continue to provide the highest standard of education in the British Isles and in Europe. Scrutiny of those objectives in our committee work will help to keep Scotland internationally competitive.

Members are aware that our committee work programmes are very busy, but despite that we

have successfully managed to incorporate European considerations in our work. I hope, however, that as the scope of European scrutiny increases, the processes for scrutiny are improved and streamlined. That will allow us to deal effectively with issues and to make the most efficient use of our limited committee time.

Some of that time will no doubt be devoted to discussing the newly installed Greek President of the Council of Europe, which will be of particular interest to members. Because Greece is a maritime nation, many of the issues that will be prioritised under the Greek presidency will be of interest to Scotland, given our vast territorial waters and economic interests in the North Sea. It is unfortunate that, as one of Europe's premier maritime nations, Scotland does not have many of the powers over portfolios that will undoubtedly be prioritised by the Greek presidency, such as maritime security and coastguard functions.

However, in reference to the Education and Culture Committee, the Greek presidency will consider a number of issues that will have particular importance to Scotland. They include European Council recommendations on investing in young people and lifelong learning, recommendations on language learning, and discussions on the role of the cultural and creative sectors in creating sustainable development. Given those priorities, I welcome the European and External Relations Committee's moves to seek direct representation by inviting the Greek ambassador to give evidence to the committee next month.

It is important that Scotland is able to engage directly with Europe, to share best practice, and to ensure that policy is being influenced to reflect Scotland's specific needs. As a member of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, I have seen how beneficial direct Scottish representation can be, and how our absence can lead to decisions being taken on our behalf that are detrimental to our interests. Our committee work should reflect that engagement as much as possible.

The Europe 2020 objectives of increasing employment, increasing the amount of energy that is generated from renewables, and accelerating economic growth while reducing poverty and greenhouse emissions, could be achieved more effectively if all the powers that influence them were held here, in the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, the recommendations that were recently given to the UK on the housing market, youth unemployment, support for low-income households, and investment in infrastructure would look somewhat different if they were directed at Scotland specifically.

I want to see Scotland at the top table so that our demographic makeup and economic conditions are taken into consideration as unique entities. We have limited powers and it is clear that a gap exists between the Scottish Parliament's ability to scrutinise and its ability to act on issues that are brought up at Europe level. Indeed, where the Scottish Parliament has power, our policy position is often contrary to policies that are being pursued by the UK Government.

Nonetheless, when we have power to act, we should continue to build on our history of good governance and we should seek to improve how we engage with the European Union. We are committed to Europe and believe that effective collaboration with our European neighbours will create better outcomes for Scotland and a stronger European Union.

Finally, it is worth reminding members that this debate is taking place in the context of two referendums. One is the potential in/out referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. It goes without saying that such a referendum would put Scotland's place under threat and could diminish our already limited voice on European matters.

The second referendum is on whether Scotland should be an independent country. That referendum will give us the opportunity to have a full place at the top table, which will greatly enhance our voice on the international stage and give us the chance to make decisions as equals with our European friends and neighbours. I look forward to that decision being a yes.

16:03

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to be speaking in today's debate on the European and External Relations Committee's report "EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2014".

In contributing to the debate, I will outline my role as one of the EU reporters to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and show how the consideration of EU policies has impacted on the work of that particular committee.

I was appointed as EU reporter by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee in September 2012, and since then I have undertaken two visits to the EU institutions in Brussels, including a visit in December 2012, to build relationships with the European Commission and the European Parliament, thereby allowing me to investigate the European dimension to the forthcoming areas of interest that come within the committee's remit. That work has also included bringing the committee's agreed EU priorities to

the attention of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as a key local government stakeholder.

I believe that I have brought EU issues to the attention of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on four occasions since 2012, mainly within the context of on-going committee inquiry work.

In my role as the EU reporter, I believe that the scrutiny of EU issues is central to the remit of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. That scrutiny includes consideration of the proposed EU legislation that is specific to our remit, the EU priorities that we identify for each year, and the wider mainstreaming of the scrutiny of proposed EU issues arising as part of our committee work programme. I am delighted that committee members have taken on board the issue of mainstreaming. EU issues are regularly raised by all committee members in any inquiry that they undertake.

In February 2013, I set out the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's key EU priorities for that year in the European and External Relations Committee parliamentary debate on the EU strategy. Those priorities were the EU multi-annual financial framework, the Scottish partnership agreement for 2014 to 2020, potential changes in European structural funds, and the changes to EU public procurement rules.

Alongside those priorities, over the period from August 2012 to December 2013, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee considered the implications of EU legislation or rules in a range of major pieces of work including scrutiny of the draft budget for 2014-15; the committee's inquiry into the implications of procurement reform for public services and community regeneration arising from the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill; and our inquiry into the delivery of regeneration in Scotland.

The committee recently submitted to the Finance Committee its report on the Scottish Government's 2014-15 draft budget, which is now the budget. Although the scrutiny of that budget did not pose any major questions on EU issues for the committee, we received evidence on the role that various EU funding mechanisms play in the revenue-generating capacity of Scottish local authorities. Gaining a clearer picture of the role of EU funding across Scottish local government is an issue to which the Local Government and Regeneration Committee may wish to return in its future work programme.

Also of concern to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee was the EU directive on public procurement. Local government procurement accounts for nearly 40 per cent of all

public procurement in Scotland and is valued at approximately £9 billion per annum. In tandem with the directive, the Scottish Government introduced the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is currently going through the bill process.

In October and November 2013, the committee took written and oral evidence on the implications of the directive and the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. As part of that, the committee examined three aspects of policy that are relevant to its remit: sustainable procurement, community benefit requirements, and the transposition of the EU directive into Scots law.

On 5 December 2013, the committee submitted its findings and recommendations to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, which is the lead committee for scrutiny of the bill. Those findings will also inform our 2014 work programme as we prepare for consideration of the forthcoming community empowerment bill.

Another of the principal EU issues for consideration by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee has been the potential changes to EU structural funds as a result of the EU multi-annual financial framework and the EU directive on public sector procurement. In January 2013, the committee launched a detailed inquiry into the delivery of the Scottish Government's regeneration strategy, which sought to examine the effectiveness of the strategy in developing community-led regeneration across Scotland. That piece of work is nearly complete, and I hope that the report will be signed off in the near future.

One of the central issues that the committee considered is the impact of potential changes to EU structural funds and the subsequent implications for regeneration in Scotland. EU structural funding is a key aspect of the regeneration sector in Scotland, both in Scottish Government funding and in regeneration activity by local government and the third or voluntary sector. As part of our inquiry, the committee took specific evidence on the role that EU structural funds play in supporting regeneration activity in Scotland and enabling the delivery of various initiatives. The committee also examined the implication of EU state aid rules in community regeneration.

Aside from the main EU priorities for 2013, the committee has sought to mainstream consideration of EU issues, as appropriate, in the rest of its work programme, and my colleagues on the committee have undertaken that role tremendously well.

As I stated earlier, scrutiny of EU issues is central to the remit of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. We live in an

interconnected political environment, which I hope might get a little simpler after 18 September, when we will get direct access to the EU. I certainly believe that it is only with independence that we can speak with our own voice in the EU and maximise the benefits of membership for the people of Scotland while contributing to addressing the shared challenges that member states and EU citizens face.

It is important that all parliamentarians and committees are aware of the impact that EU issues can have on their work and on the work of the Parliament.

16:10

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I am not sure how much interest there was in the debate before the February recess, although the committee's report was broadly welcomed, which is a sentiment that I endorse. Of course, that was before President Barroso's intervention in the independence debate at the weekend. You will be relieved to hear, Presiding Officer—as will members, probably—that I will not dwell on the subject, but the possibility that we might not even be members of the EU, or certainly not members under the current terms, casts in a new light our discussion on the impact of EU policies in Scotland.

Leaving to one side for a moment that fairly fundamental disagreement on our direction of travel as a nation, I note that there is still a great deal on which we can agree. I thank the convener of the European and External Relations Committee, Christina McKelvie, and other members for their kind words about our former colleague Helen Eadie and in particular her contribution to that committee. I believe that those comments will be warmly welcomed.

On a more political but, I hope, similarly consensual note, I hope that the convener, the cabinet secretary and members across the chamber agree that most members and parties in the Parliament are unionists—that is, European unionists, of course. For example, unlike the policies of George Osborne, most of us are entirely in agreement with the European focus on jobs and growth. On the report that we are discussing today, the response from the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee highlighted the European Commission's work programme and the concerns expressed about labour market participation among young people, older workers and some vulnerable groups.

I believe that my Labour colleagues and I can find common ground with the Scottish Government in our support for the EU's youth guarantee scheme. Although it has been good to see a fall in

overall joblessness in recent months, unemployment among young people in Scotland still stands at about one in five—as I think my colleague Willie Coffey pointed out—and it remains a hugely worrying issue not just here but in many European economies.

The youth guarantee, which was in fact a Labour initiative, has now been approved with a starting budget of €6 billion and will give young people a guarantee of work, education or training. Unfortunately, the Tory Government does not seem to share our priority. From what I can gather, the Government has yet to submit an implementation plan for the employment guarantee, which leaves us in danger of missing the boat. I certainly hope that progress is made on that in 2014.

I agree entirely with the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's observations on securing more help for small to medium-sized enterprises. Access to finance, procurement opportunities and European funds are issues of real importance for Scottish SMEs and are an area on which I hope we will also be able to make progress this year. SMEs are crucial to our success in tackling unemployment. They account for 99 per cent of all private sector businesses in the UK and 60 per cent of private sector employment. SMEs are more likely to employ people with few or no qualifications and skills, and the young and unemployed are more likely to find a way back into employment with small employers. On the other hand, most SMEs lack human resource departments and are often relatively sceptical of national recruitment schemes. There are therefore obstacles to overcome but, to provide jobs and growth, we need to work closely with our European partners on those issues.

There are other lessons that we can learn from Europe. I have mentioned before what I think is our shared admiration for the German Mittelstand companies and their work-sharing agreements and work-time accounts or Kurzarbeit. In many ways, the success of that approach is underpinned by a different set of economic values and a more ethical way of approaching the economy by, for example, placing an emphasis on loyalty to local communities, long-term thinking and worker representation on the boards of companies.

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth is looking in that direction, and he has our support on some of the work on the national performance framework, but mixed messages are coming across. For example, my colleagues in Europe have voted in favour of the financial transaction tax, while the SNP MEPs have refused to support calls for measures to combat tax evasion, tax avoidance and tax fraud. In fact, they ended up on the same

side of the debate as the Tories and the United Kingdom Independence Party, in voting against ending bilateral tax agreements.

Aside from the ability to establish free markets, one of the biggest political strengths of being part of Europe is the opportunity to advance social rights. If we fail to take advantage of that common agenda, we are missing out every bit as much as when we fail to bid for competitive funding.

I will touch briefly on two other areas. I note that the Education and Culture Committee used the report to flag up the importance of language learning—and I welcome Stewart Maxwell's comments on that earlier. I welcome and endorse that committee's call, but answers to my recent parliamentary questions revealed a staggering drop in the numbers of Scottish pupils being put forward for German examinations from almost 16,000 in 2002-03 to around 6,000 in 2012-13. On top of that dramatic reduction, the move to the curriculum for excellence and, in particular, the fact that most schools seem to be offering fewer of the new exams have now been reported as having a particularly disproportionate effect on the numbers of pupils who are coming forward to sit a modern language exam.

The Scottish Government has made a number of commitments to modern language learning, but I worry that the real picture reveals that we are going backwards. I look forward to any help that the Education and Culture Committee or the European and External Relations Committee can provide to reverse that trend.

I am also pleased that the European and External Relations Committee is taking an active interest in the EU measures to reduce human trafficking. The committee convener, Mr Coffey, Ms Ferguson and a number of other members mentioned that. I draw the minister's attention to the proposal for a member's bill on human trafficking that my colleague Jenny Marra has lodged. It lays out a number of measures that would help to tackle the issue in Scotland and that are entirely within the devolved settlement. For example, it is estimated that there are more victims of trafficking in Scotland's prisons than human traffickers themselves. The proposed bill would create a new offence of aiding, abetting or attempting to commit human trafficking and would help to prevent the victims from going to jail, all in the context of a three-year strategy that would be published and agreed by the Parliament.

I suspect that members will continue to disagree on our constitutional future within Europe, but I hope that they will also recognise our shared agenda and that all of us in Scotland are better together making common cause with the European Union.

16:16

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I apologise to the opening speakers for not being here for their speeches. There was a lack of communication, which was directly down to me.

I welcome the Scottish Government's action plan on European engagement, looking ahead to issues of importance for Scotland for the forthcoming EU presidency after Mr Barroso has gone. The programme embraces defined action plans, particularly on energy and climate change, the marine environment, research and development and, of course, security and justice.

I am delighted to participate in the debate, as I was delighted to be part of the delegation—along with the European and External Relations Committee convener and representatives of the other committees—to discuss public procurement directives in September last year. I remember a fair amount of talking but a lot more walking. In fact, I question whether there were taxis in Brussels at that time.

The profitable venture of that delegation was to discuss the Government's procurement reform proposals and attendant European directives. Having heard from Jamie McGrigor the fabulistic divergences that might occur when Scotland becomes independent, I think that it is striking that one of the features of that visit was the information that Westminster wanted to accelerate the introduction of the directives that attach to its procurement laws. I wonder why.

In addition to that area of mutual interest, as the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's European rapporteur, I made a visit on the same day to the Commission's directorate-general for enterprise and industry to discuss Europe's new funding programme for SMEs, which has been referred to.

In that meeting, and in an extension of information received at a previous meeting in Brussels, I learned that Scotland was somewhat divorced from the European Commission SME activity and funding simply because it is not a member state. Our current member state was not telling us exactly what was going on. For example, there is a programme for a small business envoy to represent small businesses in each of the member states across Europe. The Commission also holds a range of pre-directive meetings with small businesses in each of the member states but, again, we were not told about those. We had only four accredited financial enterprise organisations that could interface with the funds that I will mention in a minute; the UK had 76.

Those matters were subsequently raised with the Scottish Government and, by me, with various SME bodies. The general view was that the

Commission saw SMEs as key players in working with the European Investment Bank and the European investment fund in relation to the growth of employment and innovation across Europe. The European and External Relations Committee report called for a huge culture shift across public and corporate sectors. That was recognised as an integral part of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's access of finance inquiry, which was carried out last November and December and out of which flowed recommendations on the cost of administrative burdens on SMEs.

I am delighted that as a consequence—and, I have to say, after some provocation—a meeting was called by Scotland Europa and was held last Thursday in Edinburgh to explain the financial instruments in EU funding programmes for the period 2014 to 2020.

I would like to leave aside the horizon 2020 fund, worth €70 billion, which is designed to leverage private sector investment in research and development and innovation. Instead, I would like to focus on the competitiveness of enterprises and SMEs—COSME—programme, which aims to develop the competitiveness of enterprises and SMEs over the period from 2014 to 2020. It is worth €2.3 billion, of which €1.4 billion has been designated for financial instruments.

We all know the difficulties that SMEs have in accessing finance, whether it is needed for growth, efficiency or energy and low carbon programmes or to enable them to export outside national markets. Those funds, along with other local investment facilities, should increase annual lending and investment for SME companies in the EU by €3.5 billion over that period.

The two financial instruments—the equity facility for growth, which will provide venture capital, and mezzanine finance, for expansion and growth-stage enterprise—are, of course, key elements of that funding, as is the loan guarantee facility, which will provide counter guarantees, direct guarantees and other risk-sharing arrangements, covering loans up to €150,000, and will be available to all SMEs. That funding will no doubt help SMEs in Scotland when we sit at the top table. There is, of course, a need to develop accredited bodies that will interface with the EIF and small businesses to ensure that we capitalise on the programmes.

I have been on a fairly long political journey, and I arrived happily at the destination that I am now at. I ran eight companies across Europe, with 550 people and \$75 million of revenue. From that experience, I recognise clearly why we must achieve what we will achieve on 18 September. If some of the companies that I sat on the boards of can do what they are doing, we can as well.

We must build on those exercises and those funds. We must, in particular, engage with Scotland Europa and encourage it to evangelise across local authorities and small businesses to ensure that our SMEs are highly successful, encourage employment and increase revenues in our independent country.

16:24

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to this debate on committees of the Parliament's engagement in and scrutiny of EU policies. I agree with those members who have praised the work of the European and External Relations Committee in this area. Many, including the cabinet secretary, have commented on the importance of engagement with the EU policy agenda. It hardly needs re-emphasising but, given the impact of EU legislation and regulation on many policy areas, proactive dialogue is absolutely critical. However, many of the contributions this afternoon have led me to reflect on the engagement process, which I see as being very much an open-ended, multifaceted conversation, taking in all interested partners.

It is important that we acknowledge the progress made by the European and External Relations Committee on mainstreaming the scrutiny of various EU initiatives. Given the scope of legislation, we must be mindful of EU legislation in all areas and in all aspects of our on-going work. However, we should not allow complacency.

Scrutiny of EU policy directives and proactive engagement are worth while only so long as the Commission proves that it is responsive to the views expressed. Accordingly, I would suggest that the inclusion of a proposal on a European public prosecutor's office in the Commission's work programme should be of concern to us all. Despite the fact that, as we have heard, it has triggered the yellow-card procedure and has been rejected in its present form by so many Parliaments and forums, the Commission has indicated that it intends to maintain the proposal largely untouched.

A number of Parliaments agreed with the point raised by our Justice Committee that the proposal did not comply with the principle of subsidiarity, the importance of which is reiterated in the Scottish Government's document. "Scotland's Priorities for EU Reform". The UK Government put forward the sensible view that it would have been far better if the Commission had focused on better co-operation between national Governments, rather than introducing new legislation. I am afraid that the whole scrutiny process is rendered useless if the Commission proves so obdurate in the face of such criticism.

Moreover, when we consider some of the areas in which arguably there is the greatest sign of progress within the EU, we see the necessity for a broad view of engagement. This afternoon, we have heard about the continued commitment to growth and promoting employment as the central theme of the Commission's work. Within that, contributions have referred to the laudable aims and goals of the horizon 2020 programme. However, it is important to bear in mind that that strategy is very much being driven forward by national Governments. Indeed, many commentators have speculated that that is one of the key reasons behind its success. It is a point that the Scottish Government should perhaps bear in mind when complaining of the limitations of the present system.

To me, this demonstrates that our engagement on our EU priorities should not merely be reserved to a two-way dialogue with Brussels. It highlights the importance of our relationship with the UK Government and the potential of what can be achieved when national Governments take the lead.

I also believe that we are central to engagement with the European Commission and that, as MSPs, it is our individual responsibility to consider the impact of EU regulation in all areas of our work. That, too, has been highlighted in the debate. We should not content ourselves with our committee work or limit our deliberations to the areas set out by the Scottish Government in its priorities document. Indeed, the fact that the Commission's work programme remains focused on economic and monetary union, particularly a banking union, raises concerns. A good deal of the work in that area is welcome. However, the single resolution mechanism and the introduction of a financial transaction tax are a real concern, particularly for the threat that they pose to our banks, given that it is highly likely that transactions would simply be shifted abroad to countries where no such tax applies. Accordingly, such a tax needs to be globally imposed.

I note the robust stance of the UK Government on protecting our banks and financial institutions, which are so important, particularly in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Given the implications that such changes would have, I find it slightly surprising that there is no mention of them in the Scottish Government's priorities document. I would have thought that the Scottish Government would support the UK Government's strong line in opting out of those potentially damaging measures and would highlight that fact, given the implications of the financial transaction tax for economic growth in Scotland.

Of course, the banking union is a direct response to the EU banking crisis, which

dramatically exposed the inherent flaws in having a currency union without a political one. Despite that, we know that the Scottish Government is seriously arguing for the establishment of a currency union between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK while abandoning our long-standing and successful political union. It is a deeply flawed argument and I cannot help but agree with my colleague, Jamie McGrigor, that the Government's EU reform priorities document is so heavy on rhetoric and bluster in order to distract from the gaping holes at the centre of its plan on currency and the succession of an independent Scotland to the EU.

Chic Brodie: I hear what the member says about gaping holes. Will he help us with the gaping hole that might turn up when the UK decides to leave Europe?

Cameron Buchanan: I do not think that that is yet a possibility and I do not think that we should consider it.

I was just coming to the end of my speech. I welcome the motion, while reminding all interested parties that where the EU is concerned, there is no room for complacency. We must ensure engagement with all concerned.

16:30

Patricia Ferguson: I will begin my closing remarks by thanking very much the convener of the committee and its members, as well as the clerks and our colleagues from the Scottish Parliament information centre who attend the meeting, for their warm welcome to me as a substitute for my colleague Helen Eadie and subsequently as a full member of the committee with effect from the beginning of this year. As I think that colleagues probably know, this is likely to be my last week as a member of the committee. I have very much enjoyed being back on the committee—I was a member of the European and External Relations Committee in a previous session of the Parliament—and being part of its very important scrutiny of the elements of the white paper that relate to the committee's work. We have not always agreed—I think it would have been impossible for us to have agreed, no matter how hard we tried—but we have done our job by scrutinising those who came before us to give evidence, which is what is expected of us.

While I am doing the Oscar awards ceremony part of my speech—I promise that I will not burst into tears or go on forever—there is one other person whom I wish to thank. Members would have heard Stewart Maxwell say earlier that he is a member of the Committee of the Regions, as am I. I thank Stewart Maxwell, who is a slightly old stager with regard to the Committee of the

Regions—I am sure that he will not mind my saying that.

Stewart Maxwell: Withdraw!

Patricia Ferguson: I stress to Mr Maxwell that I mean only with regard to the Committee of the Regions. I thank him very much for the informal induction to that organisation that he provided to me a year ago when I became a member. As we know, the institutions and the mechanics of all the bodies of the EU can be labyrinthine, so it was very helpful of Mr Maxwell to guide me through them as a new member at that time. I am not sure that he likes the direction of travel that his protégé has now taken, but that is perhaps an issue for another day.

One of the things that has become clear to me during my membership of the Committee of the Regions is just how important other countries find the work of Europe and the high regard in which Europe is held by many of them. That is not to say that every action undertaken by the European Union or the Commission is met with unalloyed support across Europe, but I think it is fair to say that European issues are perhaps much better embedded in the political life of some other countries than they always are here. A debate such as this and the work that the European and External Relations Committee and other committees are doing help to strengthen our work and our position in Europe.

In that regard, I say gently to Conservative colleagues that other colleagues throughout Europe find the position of the current UK Government regarding Europe absolutely incomprehensible; they just do not understand what the UK Government hopes to get out of its current sabre rattling about renegotiation. I realise that there are differing views within the Conservative Party on the issue and I really do not want to rub salt in the wounds, but it is very difficult when one goes to Europe to try and argue a position when one is always then asked what the UK Government is thinking on the issue. I will leave that point with the Conservatives to think about.

This has been an excellent debate. Many of our colleagues have brought from their subject committees a great deal of knowledge and expertise. It has been really interesting to hear just how much the issues concerning Europe have become part of the everyday work of the committees. That was the original intention of the European and External Relations Committee, so I am very pleased to see us get to that position.

Claudia Beamish's point on climate change was absolutely right. We can set as many targets as we like but, unless we seriously work to reach those targets and monitor our progress along the

way, those targets are naught. We must be rigorous in that regard and make sure that, if we cannot reach our targets, we are honest about that and think about why that is the case.

An interesting crossover in the agendas of both the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee came through in the committee reports that we received. Both have a concern about the provision of funding for training in the renewables sector. The interesting point was made that that is an issue that might be of interest to more than one committee, and that theme is probably one that will develop as the mainstreaming work of European issues comes through. I know that the committees are pursuing the funding issue with Skills Development Scotland, so it will be very interesting to see how that plays out.

I was also pleased by the fact that many of our subject committees are engaging directly with EU commissioners and no longer consider doing that to be the exclusive domain of the European and External Relations Committee. That is a really good approach to take. I think that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has done some good work in that regard and I seriously hope that other committees will adopt that approach when they want to discuss and raise particular issues.

A great deal of work is being done across the Parliament on procurement and it will be interesting to see the impact of that work when we come to debate the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's work on underemployment was very important because we often forget that, within the statistics, there are different breakdowns and definitions. Underemployment and zero-hours contracts, particularly with regard to the employment of women, are important issues to bring to the fore, as are youth employment and job creation, which the Education and Culture Committee flagged up.

The European and External Relations Committee has done some very good work on modern languages. I was not on the committee at the time, so I am not claiming any credit for it, but I hope that the Education and Culture Committee will progress that topic. In addition, the Equal Opportunities Committee's work on Gypsy Travellers resonates with the work that is being done across Europe on the Roma and Gypsy Travellers. It is clear that there is read-across between the issues that are of such importance to us and issues at the European level.

We have heard about human trafficking. As I mentioned, I hope that the Government will commit to backing Jenny Marra's bill, which was introduced today and has all-party support.

The Equal Opportunities Committee also raised female genital mutilation. A week or two ago, we had a very good debate on that, led by Jenny Marra. That is not only a Europe-wide but a world-wide issue, and one to which we must give serious consideration.

I very much look forward to hearing the debate in May on the UK opt-out that the Justice Committee will lead. The Parliament must take the issue seriously and monitor it with a great deal of thoroughness. I am sure that the Justice Committee will do that, but the topic goes beyond the interest of that committee and members with a particular interest in the justice agenda. It is a topic that will be—or at least should be—of interest to us all.

Ken Macintosh was quite right to mention the importance of SMEs and the difficulties that they face. SMEs are much more likely to employ only one staff member or one or two people here and there, and that can often make the difference in tackling unemployment. I had worked out a little formula in answer to Willie Coffey, but the Presiding Officer is indicating to me that I need to wind up, so I will perhaps share it with Mr Coffey at Thursday's European and External Relations Committee meeting.

The work of the Parliament's committees on the European agenda is extremely good. We can always do more and I want to see that work become even more embedded than is currently the case, but we are going in the right direction. I hope that the work continues to move in that direction.

16:40

Fiona Hyslop: I congratulate members on what has been an insightful debate, marked by informed speeches, and I thank the European and External Relations Committee for its annual report on the committee's EU priorities, which has provided a basis for Government accountability to the Parliament and for positive discussions, which I hope will continue over the year.

The debate has highlighted the EU's important contribution to modern life in Scotland, as well as Scotland's significant contribution to the EU. I was struck by convener Christina McKelvie's comment that all committees are European committees now. When Stewart Maxwell talked about the extensive contribution of the Education and Culture Committee in that regard, I was struck by how different things are from when I was a member of the Education Committee, along with Ken

Macintosh. The extent of the European debate is perhaps more evident.

Patricia Ferguson was right to talk about the importance of early engagement and mainstreaming and about the importance of the transposition of EU law. I thank everyone who is involved in the extensive work of transposing EU law into Scots law and I thank the committee for its role in that regard.

David Stewart talked about rural funding, which is always a challenge, and he acknowledged the success that we have collectively achieved in addressing structural funds issues that we faced earlier in the year. I am sure that if he writes to the relevant cabinet secretary about the court cases to which he referred, he will get a response.

Willie Coffey talked about IT infrastructure. In our publication, "Scotland's Priorities for EU Reform", we identified IT as an area on which we want to focus.

Willie Coffey, Patricia Ferguson and Ken Macintosh referred to modern slavery and trafficking. We are paying close attention to the UK draft modern slavery bill. There are issues to do with the constitutional settlement in relation to what we can do, but victims of trafficking are part of our society and we must respond adequately. In our paper on EU priorities we note the importance of member states working collectively on the matter. In that regard, I thank Christina McKelvie for her extensive work on the international aspect of human trafficking and for very much bringing the agenda to the Parliament.

Rod Campbell made an interesting and informed speech about legal aspects of the freedom and justice agenda and our concern about the UK's agenda on opt-outs. Patricia Ferguson was right to say that that is not just a committee issue; I am sure that the matter will return to the European and External Relations Committee, the Justice Committee and the chamber. The issue is extensive and we must address it.

It is not possible to review the Scottish Parliament's priorities in relation to the European Union without reviewing the manner in which those priorities are taken up by the UK Government, as Scotland's representative to the EU institutions. That should be the biggest concern for this Parliament. The UK Prime Minister has gone on record to say that he is seeking a complete renegotiation of the EU treaties, so that the power can

"flow back to member states",

which will

"combine in flexible cooperation".

The UK Prime Minister is seeking a return to the days when member states acted unilaterally in their own interests, co-operating flexibly only where their interests aligned with others' interests. He wants to take back the powers that the member states have conferred on the EU institutions. That signals a retreat from collective action in Brussels to unilateral action from London. I share Patricia Ferguson's assessment of how that is being perceived by our European friends and neighbours.

It is not the EU treaties but the constitutional settlement in the UK, which has failed to keep in step with the process of European integration, that is in need of renegotiation. The base of power in many areas rests in Brussels with the EU institutions, rather than in London with the UK Government. Indeed, in our debate on Europe last year it was pointed out that roughly two-thirds of UK legislation originates in Brussels.

The report that I published today, "Scotland's Priorities for EU Reform", demonstrates how the current constitutional settlement in the UK prevents Scotland from exerting real and direct influence over the policies and laws that the Parliament has so keenly debated today, despite our best efforts to work constructively with the UK Government and the EU institutions to contribute to the reform of EU law and policy. The fact is that Scotland, its Government and its Parliament do not have a direct voice in the European Union.

In setting out its reform agenda, the Scottish Government has covered semesters 2 and 3 in the submissions that it has already made to the UK and, only last week, the UK published its response, particularly in relation to semester 2. This debate is therefore very timely because we need to be aware of the issues and what the Scottish Parliament views as this country's EU priorities.

Now is the time for the nation to consider how Scotland can best be represented in this particular seat of power and how this Parliament and its Government can best influence European laws and policies in accordance with Scotland's priorities. None of the other member states wants to remove that choice from the people of Scotland. The German Government has said that

"the Scots will decide on their independence in a referendum on 18 September 2014 ... the federal government will respect the result and does not prejudge it."

The Slovenian Government has said:

"Slovenia recognises the universal right of peoples to self-determination expressed through a democratic process. We believe that this is an internal political matter of every individual state."

The Polish Government has said:

“The question of Scottish independence is a matter to be decided within the United Kingdom. Poland will respect the outcome of any arrangement that would be applied.”

The French Government has said:

“This is a domestic political issue for the UK. We cannot possibly comment.”

Ken Macintosh: I welcome the cabinet secretary’s comments, but what does she make of the First Minister’s spokesperson’s comment yesterday that if other EU countries, such as Spain, did not accept Scotland’s membership under independence they would be blockaded from the North Sea?

Fiona Hyslop: It is really important that we understand the real arguments about democracy here—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please, Mr Brodie and Mr Macintosh.

Fiona Hyslop: We need to understand the arguments about democracy and the rights of the people of Scotland to make their own decision, and I am simply citing a number of quotations from other European Governments that recognise that. For example, the Lithuanian Government has said:

“Lithuania will respect the will of the Scottish people to be expressed at the 2014 referendum held in line with the Edinburgh Agreement”

and the Government of the Czech Republic has said:

“the Czech Republic will respect the will expressed by the Scottish people in the referendum on Scotland’s independence that is to be held in the latter half of 2014.”

All those member states are absolutely right: the independence referendum is a matter for the people of Scotland. Other countries have recognised that it is for the Scottish people to decide their own future and that on 18 September the future of Scotland will lie in their hands and their hands alone.

However, on the note of consensus that Ken Macintosh has asked for and his appeal for a shared agenda, I say to him that we will make that decision as a nation that is well engaged with the European democratic ideal and a Parliament that is well engaged with the European priorities and which has an opportunity to contribute constructively to the reform of EU law and policy from an informed and engaged position, having comprehensively assessed European competences, policies and priorities.

Ken Macintosh: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am just closing.

I thank the committee for its contribution towards achieving that position, which ensures not only that Scotland as a whole is well engaged with

the European priorities and that we can account for them in the Parliament, but that we look outwards and contribute to a very positive policy agenda in the EU.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christina McKelvie to wind up the debate on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee. Ms McKelvie, you have until 4.49 pm.

16:48

Christina McKelvie: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. Having opened this afternoon’s debate—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must apologise, Ms McKelvie. I meant 4.59 pm.

Christina McKelvie: I was wondering.

Having opened this afternoon’s debate, I am now in the fortunate position of being able to close it. I realise that that is quite unusual for a committee debate but our friend and colleague Hanzala Malik has not been able to make it to the chamber today. We send him our best wishes and I hope that we will be able to work very closely together over the next year.

The debate has been very interesting and it has been helpful to hear MSPs highlight their personal areas of interest along with their committees’ European priorities for the coming year. As has been said, we are going through change this year, with the European elections in May and the appointment of a new college of commissioners over the summer—not forgetting the referendum in September and, I believe, the swearing-in of new MEPs over the summer. It is therefore important that we consider the European dimension at all times and mainstream such issues in our day-to-day work.

In thanking members of the committee for their contributions over the past year and the members who spoke in today’s debate, I want to echo comments made by some committee members about the importance of EU funding and support to ensure that Scotland can pursue its domestic policies.

The Scottish Government’s digital agenda and the roll-out of broadband across all parts of Scotland rely on those funds and this committee and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee will continue to monitor developments in that area to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on the roll-out of broadband across all areas of Scotland. I will touch on that a wee bit more later.

I reiterate the earlier point regarding Scotland’s farmers, crofters and fishermen: it is imperative that the Parliament continues to scrutinise the

implications of recent agriculture and fisheries policy reform for the support that those people receive.

A diverse range of issues has been raised by members from across the chamber, which is a testament to the work that the committees are doing on EU issues that impact on Scotland. Just to give a flavour of the issues, I will run through them—in chronological order, almost. The issues include early engagement in mainstreaming, the CAP budget, the CFP budget, digital infrastructure, youth employment, structural EU funding and other types of EU funding, justice and home affairs, education and culture, public procurement, youth employment in small and medium enterprises, support for SMEs, climate change, funding for training, the renewables sector, trafficking and FGM issues and—withstanding the in/out referendum—direct access to council meetings and Scotland's place in Europe. A very diverse range of issues indeed. I will try to pick some of them out as I sum up.

In her opening remarks, the cabinet secretary addressed clearly some of the very political questions that we have had today. I will not spend too much time on that area because we have already spent time on it and we have an on-going inquiry in the committee considering the proposals on Scotland's place in Europe and how to take that forward. Certainly, the committee is continuing to take evidence on that and will take any evidence from any quarter that has something to add to the debate.

One of the key aspects that the committee has been looking at, which seems to have a clear impact on other committees, is structural funds and other opportunities for funding from Europe. I see my colleague Dave Stewart nodding his head at that. He will know, along with Linda Stewart, that the committee has worked very hard to ensure that we look at every aspect of European funding—structural funding or any other type of funding—that we can perhaps get our fingers on and use to boost our economic output in Scotland to create opportunities for our young people and develop and boost the economic growth of our rural sector as well as our cities.

One clear aspect of that European funding is how we fund youth employment. There is the €52 million that was mentioned, along with I think £50 million in total from the Scottish Government—£10 million of that coming from EU funding—which will help 10,000 additional young people get access to real opportunities to raise their skill levels and will then have a general impact on unemployment figures. We heard about the very distressing unemployment figures in Spain and about how we are working on unemployment in Scotland. I hope that we are

perhaps creating some examples that our friends in Spain could follow in the light of the success that we have had.

We have also heard about the disappointment of Scottish ministers who still find it difficult to get their voices heard at council meetings. That is an issue that this committee has looked at. One or two ministers seem to be very successful in getting their voices heard. I think that that is a testament to the fact that they have become expert in their particular field—Richard Lochhead being one of them, along with other ministers. However, the fact that ministers are still not getting their voices heard is very important indeed to the committee.

I say to Patricia Ferguson that we were glad that she joined the committee because she has such a wealth of knowledge. Her participation in the Committee of the Regions has always been helpful as she can share what she knows about what is going on from that point of view. To then lose you again, Patricia, is a loss to the committee and we wish you all the best in where you go. In many cases, we do not agree on issues in the committee, but in many other cases we do and we work very hard to progress those areas that we agree on. You will be missed from the committee, Patricia—Ms Ferguson, sorry.

Patricia Ferguson raised a point about our on-going inquiry—we hope that it will report in late spring or early summer—into the Scottish Government's proposals on Scotland's place in Europe. As I said before, we have taken detailed and interesting evidence and the committee remains open to any other information that people think that we can use to inform that inquiry.

The inquiry is continuing. Jamie McGrigor mentioned it and said that he would look forward to crossing swords with me, but it is a testament to our conduct that the only weapons that we use in Scotland in our fight for what we believe in are words, not swords. I do not own a sword, so Jamie McGrigor will need to put up with me using my words as weapons. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry; Mr McGrigor is getting a wee bit anxious, but I was just having a bit of fun.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I think that Mr McGrigor was making an intervention from a sedentary position.

Christina McKelvie: Yes—that is okay.

Jamie McGrigor raised an extremely important part of the committee's continuing scrutiny, which is about how we drill down and get to the point at which we understand what a European directive means or what impact a change in policy will have. Jamie McGrigor is very good at that.

So, too, is my colleague Willie Coffey, who is always on the ball on the digital agenda. He raised concerns about the speed of progress and the building of IT infrastructure. There is not an aspect of IT infrastructure and how we can significantly improve it in Scotland that Mr Coffey has not scrutinised with forensic focus. As Patricia Ferguson said, we are talking about improvements in not just rural areas but our cities.

Mr Coffey also mentioned the anti-trafficking co-ordinator. It was a great honour to have her come to the committee to speak about the challenges that are faced in that area. She certainly opened our eyes and our ears to the challenges that exist and the progress that has been made in dealing with that abhorrent practice.

In relation to what Dave Stewart said about structural funds, I do not think that we disagree on anything. He extended an invitation to the committee to come and visit the Highlands and Islands to see the Kessock bridge and the Mallaig road. As someone who once travelled the Mallaig road on a very romantic journey, I would be delighted to bring the committee to the area. We will discuss taking up that invitation at a future meeting.

David Stewart: I was very happy to extend an invitation to visit the Mallaig road, but I did not realise that the romantic aspect of the invitation was being extended as well.

Christina McKelvie: I did say that it was a romantic journey that I once made, but I will look forward to reliving some of that in my head.

Rod Campbell covered some extremely important justice and home affairs issues. The UK Government has now decided to ignore the recommendations of the House of Lords European Union Select Committee and to go ahead with the proposals to opt out on important justice and home affairs matters such as the EU arrest warrant and the EU public prosecutor's office. Our committee and the Justice Committee will keep that on our radar.

Stewart Maxwell talked about how we educate our young people. He mentioned the committee's inquiry into the teaching of foreign languages and the fact that it has worked extremely well in raising the profile of the issue and engaging more people in language teaching. He spoke about qualification levels and how we are already beating the EU targets. That just shows the extent of the crossover in the work of different committees. Mr Maxwell also talked about the gap in representation.

Stuart McMillan addressed the issue of public procurement, which is extremely important to the committee and which I raised in my opening speech.

Ken Macintosh scared me by suggesting that I was a unionist. To clarify, I am a European internationalist—I will never be called a unionist. He raised some serious issues, such as the fact that the UK Government has yet to ratify the youth guarantee scheme. I look forward to working with my colleagues across the chamber to ensure that that happens.

Chic Brodie reminded us about the economic impact of SMEs, horizon 2020 and the COSME programme. He gave us in-depth information on the potential of financial instruments and how we should evangelise on all those fronts.

I hope that other members found the committee's report interesting and not boring. I look forward to meeting the Greek ambassador. As Jamie McGrigor mentioned, the ambassador will come to the Parliament in early spring to talk about the incoming Greek presidency and its priorities for the forthcoming six months. We will hold a reception on 5 March and will hear from the ambassador on 6 March.

I think that members will agree from all that has been said that the committee is engaged in an extremely diverse and interesting range of activity. We hope to take that forward and maintain that interest over the next year.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09066, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for Wednesday 19 February 2014.

Motion moved,

(a) That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 19 February 2014—

delete

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

and insert

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

delete

7.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and insert

8.00 pm Decision Time

(b) That the Parliament agrees that Rules 2.2.4, 2.2.5(b) and 2.2.5(c) of Standing Orders be suspended for the purpose of allowing the Parliament to meet beyond 7.00 pm, and Rule 5.6.1(c) of Standing Orders be suspended for the purpose of Members' Business, on Wednesday 19 February 2014.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-08974, in the name of John Lamont, on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09001, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on the report "EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2014", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the European and External Relations Committee's 1st Report, 2014 (Session 4): *EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2014* (SP Paper 465).

St Ninian Ways

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08831, in the name of Aileen McLeod, on the St Ninian ways, a proposed European cultural route. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it considers the significance of Whithorn as an important historical and archaeological site in the establishment and development of Christianity in Scotland; considers that Whithorn has a strong association with St Ninian, leading to the burgh's status as a major centre of pilgrimage over 16 centuries of Scottish history; notes that Paisley Abbey and Crossraguel Abbey are already part of the Cluniac European Cultural Route, and considers that the creation of The St Ninian Ways as a new European Cultural Route with Whithorn as its destination would stimulate economic regeneration along the routes and help to increase the profile of Whithorn as a site of major significance both to Scottish history and to the development of Christianity in western Europe.

17:02

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to lead this debate tonight about how we can recognise the historical significance of Whithorn as the first known Christian site in Scotland and the cradle of Christianity in Scotland, and how Whithorn can become the destination for a number of long-distance walking routes—the St Ninian ways—which in my opinion would make an ideal candidate for European cultural route status. I thank colleagues across the chamber for signing my motion and enabling tonight's debate to take place.

I also thank a number of people who have worked on developing the concept of a European cultural trail and on promoting Whithorn more widely, particularly James Cormack Brown, who I am very pleased has been able to join us tonight with his wife Susi; Julia Muir-Watt of the Royal Burgh of Whithorn and District Business Association; and Janet Butterworth and all the trustees of the Whithorn Trust. A special mention must go to my colleague Councillor Alistair Geddes, a tireless champion of Whithorn, who first introduced me to the concept of Whithorn as the cradle of Scottish Christianity and a place of modern pilgrimage.

The royal burgh of Whithorn in the Machars of Galloway has a very long history as a pilgrimage centre. In fact, as far as anyone can tell, it was AD 397 when St Ninian established his church at Whithorn. The year is significant because it is 150 years earlier than St Columba and Iona. What began as a small stone church quickly adopted a significant degree of importance and influence in

the early mediaeval world; that is supported by archaeological evidence of a flourishing relationship with the rest of Europe.

Whithorn was a destination for high-profile pilgrims, including Robert the Bruce; David II; Margaret of Denmark, who was the wife of James III and mother of James IV; King James IV, who made the journey in every year of his reign; and Mary Queen of Scots. It was also a destination for tens of thousands of unnamed pilgrims over more than a millennium. It has therefore both national and international importance.

I am conscious that that was an extremely brief outline of the significance of Whithorn, but I hope that it establishes in some way that we have something very special to work with when explaining why a European cultural route, in particular, has so much potential for boosting the economic, cultural and historical profile of Whithorn.

European cultural routes are transnational tourist trails, determined by the Council of Europe. It is interesting and perhaps encouraging that the first and most successful of the routes was another pilgrim route: the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Such routes must be based on one or more themes. According to the criteria for selection, the route

“must be meaningful in terms of European memory, history and cultural heritage ... must lend itself to cultural and educational exchanges for ... young people”

and

“must allow for ... exemplary and innovating initiatives and projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable development.”

It therefore makes sense for the St Ninian ways proposal to focus on the related themes of pilgrimage and Scottish migration in Europe.

At present, Scotland has limited involvement in the European cultural routes, with only Shetland, Aberdeen and the abbeys of Paisley and Crossraguel featuring on any of the 26 current routes. The creation of the St Ninian ways and their acceptance by the Council of Europe as a cultural route would significantly redress the balance, and it would also dramatically enhance Whithorn's status since, as the route's destination, it would become a focal point of international recognition.

Although I have focused on Whithorn, the benefits of the route would be felt along its length as it would bring greater prominence to many other sites that deserve wider recognition. An example is Glenluce abbey—a Cistercian monastery that was founded around 1190 by Roland or Lochlann, Lord of Galloway and Constable of Scotland—which the Cabinet

Secretary for Culture and External Affairs and I visited two years ago.

To be considered as a candidate for funding to develop a European cultural route, the bid must be made by at least five member states together, so the more countries that encompass the route, the better. Of course, the United Kingdom is only one member state, so in order just to get started, a degree of international recognition and support must be secured. In my view, no part of that process can do anything other than enhance Whithorn's profile in a positive way.

The St Ninian ways will involve more than one route, in the same way that the St James's way to Santiago de Compostela has many physical routes. A route that has already been examined in detail is the Ayrshire pilgrim trail from Glasgow via Paisley abbey and Crossraguel, both of which are already recognised in the European network of Cluniac sites. Its status gives us something to build on and helps to plug Scotland and the potential St Ninian ways into existing European cultural routes. Additionally, many other countries have strong cultural and heritage links to the themes of the St Ninian ways, such as Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Germany, France and Italy, to name but a few.

In common with Santiago de Compostela, Whithorn is a current place of pilgrimage, so it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that a significant increase in visitors is achievable. In 1985, only 690 people received the certificate of completion at Santiago de Compostela, but last year the number was more than 215,000. We cannot possibly say what numbers we might realise for the St Ninian ways, but we can safely expect them to increase, which in turn can only be good for a comparatively remote and fragile rural economy in the south-west of Scotland.

In considering how to take forward the proposal, I am aware that the next funding call will be issued in March. To be ready to apply for funding, a key step is to form a non-profit intergovernmental association to commission and co-ordinate the work that is necessary to present a case to the Council of Europe. Given that we are not yet at that point, a sensible initial step would perhaps be to establish a small steering group to identify possible partners and set up the association that will eventually present the bid. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be prepared to assist with that first—and probably most difficult—step, perhaps in the first instance by meeting me and other key stakeholders.

Whithorn has a unique and fascinating history and it is fortunate to have people who are looking creatively at the economic and social challenges that their community faces. The Royal Burgh of

Whithorn and District Business Association's festival last year—"All Roads Lead to Whithorn"—gave everyone who attended, including me, a flavour of what might be possible. We could actually make that title true, and in doing so place Whithorn on the international stage.

The creation of the St Ninian ways and their recognition as a European cultural route offers us a fantastic opportunity to promote Whithorn both within Scotland and on a much wider stage. That promotion, if it is done well, has every chance of attracting many more people to Whithorn, with all the economic, cultural and educational benefits that that will, in turn, bring to the local economies right along the routes. It would also give Scotland the first European cultural route with a destination and a focal point in Scotland, which is altogether different from simply being a point along the way. Locally, nationally and internationally that is a worthwhile goal, and I very much hope that it will be pursued to fruition.

17:10

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I congratulate Aileen McLeod on bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank her for confirming that it is indeed James Brown in the gallery. My eyesight is not as it should be and I hope that he will forgive me for not having recognised him instantly. I welcome him to the chamber; it is good to see him.

One of the more remarkable facts about St Ninian is that, despite the universal acknowledgement that Scotland's first saint began his missionary work in AD 397, virtually nothing—or very little—was known about him until 350 years later, when the historian Bede wrote his book, "History of the English Church and People."

As the opening sentence on the Whithorn Trust's website says rather seductively, St Ninian "is a shadowy figure in history."

However, if his figure is shadowy, his legacy certainly is not. Although no written references exist from the time when he was alive, enough has been written since to establish the true facts of the impact that he has had on the south-west of Scotland—and indeed, one can argue, on the whole of Scotland—ever since.

St Ninian's impact on Whithorn alone was quite incredible, as it was a place of enormous influence right up to the reformation. As the birthplace of Scottish Christianity it attracted pilgrims from far and wide to see Scotland's first church, the Candida Casa. Whithorn became a commercial centre; it was a crossroads for the sea-borne trade routes that predominated at the time.

As early as the fifth century, Whithorn had contact with Gaul. It also had a sophisticated church hierarchy and was importing fine wines and pottery to a thriving and prosperous community that was in touch with the comparatively new world of Christian ideas, arts and culture that came from Europe and beyond. Indeed, some people have said that Whithorn was in reality Scotland's first town. Its reputation grew to the extent that, by the middle ages, the shrine that it had become was visited by kings and queens from Robert the Bruce to Mary Queen of Scots, who were numbered among the thousands of pilgrims who visited annually.

In those heady days, all roads led to Whithorn. Just last year Aileen McLeod and I attended—as she mentioned—a truly remarkable event that was the culmination of a project called, “All Roads Lead to Whithorn.” There was an open-air showing of a film that documented the skills, talents, lives, hopes and aspirations of Whithorn folk of all generations, which concluded an ambitious project that involved local schools and other community bodies in taking the project forward. As I said at the time, I cannot help but feel that the project is the start of something good, and I look forward to the next stage with eager anticipation.

The project seemed to give added impetus to the existing proposal to create—or, I should perhaps say, to recreate—the St Ninian ways, which ran from Paisley abbey to Whithorn, taking in other sights of great importance and significance to Christian history such as Dundonald castle, Crossraguel abbey and Glenluce abbey. Trails or ways such as those were once relatively commonplace routes that were used by pilgrims on their annual journeys, and I agree that the time is absolutely right to look at reopening some of them. Like other members, I congratulate James Brown of Cormack Brown on the work that he has carried out on the feasibility of the project and on his continuing interest in it. I also congratulate the Whithorn business association and the Whithorn Trust for the way in which they have supported and encouraged the project.

There is a huge and growing interest in Christian history, and there can be no better place to foster that interest than Whithorn. I firmly believe that the recreation of the St Ninian ways as a European cultural route is—to put it in modern-day terminology—something of a no-brainer. Perhaps we will soon be able to say once again that all roads lead to Whithorn.

17:14

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): First, I congratulate Aileen McLeod on securing the debate and express my support

for her request for assistance from the cabinet secretary.

Ms Hyslop might remember that I wrote to her last year on the subject of financial support for the Whithorn Trust and the development of the St Ninian ways pilgrim routes. I was prompted to do so by the aforesaid James Brown, and I pay tribute to him and his wife Susie Cormack Brown for their outstanding development work on the Ayrshire way, which is also known as the Ayrshire pilgrims way and which can be regarded as the first, and perhaps foremost, of those routes.

Indeed, it was the Browns who first introduced me to the concept of religious tourism and the fact that Scotland is an underexploited market. In 2010, James was the driving force behind celebrations in Scotland to mark the founding of the Burgundy-based Cluniac order 1,100 years ago. The abbeys of Paisley and Crossraguel—which, for the uninitiated, is just outside Maybole—are integral components of the Europe-wide network of Cluniac sites, which is a well-established European cultural route in its own right.

I was honoured to take part in a ceremony at Crossraguel, representing the Scottish Government, along with many visiting guests from Cluny and others from elsewhere in Europe. We were all treated to a historical tableau of medieval times followed by insightful tour of the abbey complex. That experience opened my eyes to the marketing potential of a pilgrims trail, even for a non-religious person such as myself. It also made me wonder why we do not, as a country, make more of our religious heritage.

It is true that it has been a touchy subject. Post reformation, pilgrimage was outlawed and second offenders even faced execution. Thankfully those days are long past and forgotten now. In June 2011, all our mainstream denominations signed an inter-church declaration in support of pilgrimage and the development or restoration of pilgrim routes.

There also seems to be a growing appetite for a slower type of tourism combining the physical, such as walking or cycling, with the spiritual and connecting with nature or the past. Perhaps people are trying to define who we are and what our place is in the world.

To end on a more materialistic note, however, according to VisitScotland walking and cycling tourists spend more than the average holidaymaker, bringing £40 to £60 a day to the local economy, so pilgrim traffic is worth investing in. I commend the motion.

17:18

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I begin by congratulating both Aileen McLeod on securing the debate this evening and those who are involved in promoting the idea of making Whithorn this particular focus. I hope that they have great success, and I will explain why in a second.

Unlike other colleagues who will speak in the debate, I do not represent the south of Scotland, but I can claim some connection with the area, having worked in Galloway for a number of years and having visited Whithorn on a number of occasions. It is a very special place.

As we have heard, the history of St Ninian is somewhat shadowy. I suppose that that is only to be expected of a figure about whom there are no contemporary written accounts. Archaeology suggests that there was a settlement at Whithorn by the fifth century and that its people were trading and importing luxury goods from the Mediterranean, while working the land to produce food together. In the context of the debate that we have just had about the European Union and our shared agenda, it occurs to me that Whithorn was a very early example of that kind of experience.

Of course, the Latinus stone, the earliest Christian monument in Scotland, shows that the community was Christian. It is also clear that, by 731, St Ninian's fame was sufficient to be written about—as we have heard—by the Venerable Bede, and that Whithorn was a place of pilgrimage by the seventh century.

It seems that St Ninian studied in Rome and was ordained a bishop there, but that he also studied with St Martin of Tours, for whom his episcopal see was named. Ninian seems to have brought a number of Roman influences home with him, as his church—the Candida Casa or Whit Herne—was reputed to have been built with stone, which was a fairly unusual building technique in Scotland at that time.

Although Bede may have been one of Ninian's earliest known chroniclers, Aelred of Rievaulx, who wrote "The Life of St Ninian" in the 12th century, may be responsible for the international reputation that Ninian was to enjoy because of Aelred's connections to the widespread Cluniac and Benedictine family. That may account for the international reputation and appreciation of Ninian that steadily grew and enhanced Whithorn's reputation as a centre of pilgrimage. To this day, churches and other religious and ecclesiastical buildings are named for Ninian. For many years, I was a parishioner of St Ninian's church in Knightswood, in Glasgow, and I was married there some years ago.

The current project to re-establish the pilgrimage route that was lost to us at the time of the reformation, which included Dundonald castle, Crossraguel abbey and Glenluce abbey, seems to be very worthy of support. The 75-mile route would provide a spiritual pathway for many and would take in some of the most beautiful parts of our country. Having taken part in a number of pilgrimages, I can think of only one that could rival the scenery and inspiration that one might get on that journey. I hope that it will draw in visitors from areas of Europe where St Ninian is recognised and revered, re-establishing Whithorn and Galloway as a centre of pilgrimage once again. Someone would have to be very hard hearted not to be inspired as they walked along the route.

The infrastructure that would accompany such a route needs to be considered, and I am mindful of the fact that the needs and aspirations of pilgrims might be a little different from the needs of tourists, who would have a less spiritual approach to their journey. However, each group of travellers would need somewhere to stay and a way of accessing transport that suited their needs. Historically, that balance has always been a difficult one for pilgrimages and pilgrim routes.

When I was thinking about the debate, it occurred to me that, a few years ago, we had a very similar example of this kind of work in the joining together of Hadrian's wall, the Antonine wall and the Limes in Germany, along with other Roman walls throughout Europe, to have them jointly considered as having a particular value. I wonder whether the work that Historic Scotland did in that regard might be helpful in taking forward this particular agenda.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to draw to a close.

Patricia Ferguson: The approach that Aileen McLeod outlined, developing the project in an organic way, seems to be the right one. With the right promotion and consideration, a European cultural route as described by Aileen McLeod in her motion would be very worthy of support.

17:23

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Aileen McLeod on securing the debate. The story of Whithorn is an excellent example of the rich and ancient heritage of the region that she and I represent, and the debate is most welcome as a means of highlighting places in South Scotland that are sometimes overlooked despite their obvious attractions.

In the fourth century, Scotland's first saint, Ninian, began his holy mission to the southern peoples of Scotland two centuries prior to St Columba's journey to the Western Isles.

Whithorn's proximity to the sea, which was the motorway of the day, meant that the south-west of Scotland was a hive of activity in ancient times. For almost a millennium after Ninian's death, thousands embarked on the pilgrimage to Whithorn, bringing considerable prosperity to the small community.

In the 16th century, as anti-Catholicism grew, pilgrimages were banned and the town went into decline. Perhaps knowledge of Ninian went into decline as well. However, that was not the case for me, as I attended St Ninian's primary school in the town of Gourrock, on the west coast. The hymn "Ninian of Galloway" is imprinted on my brain, and the Candida Casa was the badge on our school blazers, so I was very familiar with St Ninian and Whithorn, although I had not visited the place.

Today, the historical significance of Whithorn and of St Ninian's influence on the growth of Christianity is overshadowed by the popular fame of Iona, but it should not be. Whithorn's geographical position puts the town at a disadvantage when it comes to economic development. It is largely isolated from Scotland's centres of population and does not lie on popular tourist routes. The recreation of the St Ninian ways as an ancient pilgrim route following an historical trail from Glasgow via Govan, Paisley and Ayrshire to Whithorn is therefore an exciting opportunity to stimulate economic growth throughout the entire region.

As has been said, throughout continental Europe, pilgrimage routes are an increasingly integral part of tourism and have been proven to be especially beneficial in bringing much-needed economic activity to rural areas. It is for that reason that special efforts are now being made in different parts of Scotland to re-establish ancient trails. As has been said, the St Ninian ways is a community-led initiative by Cormack Brown Ltd, with the aim of developing all the pilgrimage trails to Whithorn and Galloway as a single entity. I welcome that ambition and the development, which seeks to encourage visitors to spend more time in the region and to enjoy its natural heritage, local food and wide range of visitor attractions. The trail will follow several strands and will be open to all forms of traveller—on foot or by bicycle, car, coach or train.

I, too, hope that the route will eventually be recognised by the Council of Europe as a European cultural route. The cultural routes programme was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987 with the objective of demonstrating how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared cultural heritage. The routes have achieved noteworthy progress in the past two decades and have been shown to encourage widespread community

participation in cultural activities. Small and medium-sized enterprises all over the south-west of Scotland, such as artisan and craft businesses, could really benefit from an influx of such tourists who, as my colleague Adam Ingram said, spend more money than others.

As I said, I grew up with the badge representing St Ninian on my school blazer. It is strange that, despite spending a lot of my childhood doing religious activities, I never actually visited Whithorn, because there was no tradition of pilgrimage at that time. A couple of years ago, all the St Ninian's schools in Scotland were invited to walk through Edinburgh with His Holiness the Pope. It strikes me that there is a huge potential for children right across Scotland to reconnect with the area. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will think about that. I know that money is tight, but it is a nice idea for children to have the opportunity to find out about that aspect of their heritage.

17:27

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): As other members have done, I congratulate Aileen McLeod on securing the debate. To pick up on a point that Adam Ingram made about funding, I renew my request to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs to earmark the Whithorn Trust as being eligible for core museum funding, which would give it opportunities to get funding to help with its good work.

It might be curious to some people that an ancient religious centre such as Whithorn should be in what they might think of as a remote part of Scotland, but St Ninian's time was post Roman—in the dark ages—and I imagine that to travel across land in those times was not the easiest thing to do. The seas, however, were the motorways of the dark ages, which might have been to Whithorn's advantage at the time. It is therefore hardly surprising that St Ninian is reputed to have landed in east Donegal, that he gave his name to St Ninian's point on Belfast Lough or that goods from the Mediterranean have been extracted from the site at Whithorn, which gives proof of the channels of travel in those times.

St Ninian is reputed to have travelled much further than Ireland—to Rome, itself. The famous Northumbrian monk Bede refers in his chronicles to Ninian's having been educated in Rome. It is thought that Ninian was the son of an early Christian king, which is likely; I doubt that a person who had had a humbler upbringing would have been able to afford the journey to Rome for their education in the dark ages. We will probably never know what led the noble Ninian to follow the calling of the cloth, but he was ahead of his time, because it was 150 years or so later when St

Columba converted the northern Picts and famously landed on Iona. Perhaps St Ninian was not the first to start converting the southern Picts, but he certainly must have dedicated his life to doing so at a time when Christianity was not the norm.

The dark ages were called “dark” because there was little writing of events, unlike in Roman times and in later years, when Bede chronicled the arrival of the Vikings. Stories were passed down not on parchment but through the spoken word, often with rhyme to aid the memory. Bede would have been aware of those rhythmic stories, but there may have been some elaboration from generation to generation as the story of Ninian was passed down the line.

There may have been no contemporary writing about Ninian, but his story and the proof of worship at Whithorn left their mark as, some 700 years after him, there was a huge cathedral at the site and Whithorn had grown into a major destination for pilgrimage. By then, there was a long history of miraculous cures being attributed to St Ninian, as people had prayed to him and made the pilgrimage to Whithorn.

Unsurprisingly, it was not until the reformation that Whithorn’s visitors declined. However, they never stopped. Even to this day, many people make their way there to recognise St Ninian’s importance. Therefore, I agree with Aileen McLeod that Whithorn should be recognised for its importance. St Ninian was Scotland’s first saint. He converted many southern Picts and there is no doubt that his influence has gone further than these shores, with dedications to him found not only extensively throughout Scotland from Shetland down to Galloway, but over the pond in New Scotland—Nova Scotia—and in many places in northern England.

St Ninian is, without doubt, of great significance to our history and to that of Europe. I agree that it is only right that he be given further recognition by the creation of the St Ninian ways as a European cultural route. His influence can still lead to improvements in the south-west by attracting visitors and highlighting the importance of Whithorn’s place in history.

17:32

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Aileen McLeod on securing the debate.

Members must be wondering what on earth I am doing in a debate about Whithorn and St Ninian. Forty years or so ago, I could not have predicted that there would be a Scottish Parliament or that I would be here contributing to a members’

business debate; I was looking out of Victorian classroom windows in Whithorn secondary school, where I had gone to teach as a newly married young woman.

I had little knowledge of Galloway, let alone of Whithorn, before that, but I came to realise that what was then to me—I apologise to Whithorn—a Sleepy Hollow sort of a place, because I had come from urbane Dunfermline, was still a royal burgh and had been a busy centre of pilgrimage on account of its connections with St Ninian, who is Scotland’s premier saint. As others have said, we forget that the seas and rivers were the highways and byways of the time.

I recall a debate in 2009 in the name of Alasdair Morgan that recognised and underlined the historical significance of Whithorn. It is more the cradle of Christianity here than is the more famous Iona. It predates the time of St Columba by 150 years or so, but little is known about the historical life of Ninian, who is known as the apostle to the southern Picts.

I congratulate the Whithorn Trust on how much it has done to publicise and preserve sites that are connected to St Ninian. It should cast its eyes to Wigtown and the success of the book town festival, which I thought would never succeed but which has blossomed, as has Wigtown.

Not only have I been to Iona—in my youth, which was unfortunately not misspent, I stayed in the commune there before it had running water and electricity—but I have been to St Ninian’s cave, which may well have changed considerably in the past 40 years due to erosion and the ingress of the sea on the pebbly beach. I say to Adam Ingram that I think that I have been an accidental religious tourist.

I took my class to St Ninian’s cave or, rather, they took me one bonnie spring day through the farmyard through which one goes and to a glorious Physgill glen where, for the first time, this erstwhile townie saw wild iris, daffodils and hyacinths and waxed lyrical over the banks of wild primroses, much to the embarrassment and amusement of her secondary 1 class. We came out from the dappled light into bright sunshine and the rough pebble beach strewn with driftwood and then turned to the small, dark and dank cave that is purported to have been the shelter for St Ninian. It was one of those days that I can never forget—absolutely perfect and unexpected, and a bit magical. That was when the well-kept secret history of this part of Scotland—the mystery of it—first caught my imagination. It was also when I became aware of the early days of archaeological excavation in Whithorn.

The debate has minded me to go back to Whithorn. However, perhaps it has changed now. I

might find the glen less majestic, the cave a bit smaller, the pebbly beach a bit shrunken. I will recommend that others go and perhaps they will confirm that I need not fear that the passage of time has been other than true to my cherished memories of that day on my way to St Ninian's cave.

17:35

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I congratulate Aileen McLeod on bringing the debate to the chamber.

Members' business debates are often occasions on which we get drawn to something about which we knew almost nothing. Of course, it is quite appropriate that Aileen McLeod should be the member who brings this debate to the chamber, since it was George MacLeod who reinstated Iona as a place of pilgrimage for St Columba.

Various members—most recently Patricia Ferguson—have talked about connections with St Ninian across Scotland. My ancestry is from St Ninian's parish, which is, essentially, the parish of Bannockburn, so I claim that connection. The cabinet secretary will be able to claim a connection because of St Ninian's kirk in Linlithgow, where my late mother-in-law used to worship. Right across Scotland we see the cultural and historical imprint of St Ninian. For my part—I suspect the same is true of many others—I have never questioned who this person is. If this debate has done anything for me, it has caused me to find out a bit about this person of whom I had no knowledge whatever.

In establishing the cultural routes across Europe, the Council of Europe seeks to reflect the complexity of our cultures and societies. The cultural routes website says that there are 29 such trails. I look forward in particular to visiting the *iter vitae*—the ways of the vineyards of Europe. I think that I might be able to persuade my wife that one of our holidays could be anchored on that. As someone who is interested in family history, the European cemeteries route looks remarkably attractive, as does the thermal heritage and thermal towns route, especially if I decide that I need to address the increasing pain in my elderly bones.

With such great diversity in the routes, there is surely space for something that touches so many countries, that brings a new dimension to our understanding of early Christianity—not simply in Scotland or Pictland, but in all the places that St Ninian was involved with.

I must confess that I have not spent very much time in the south of Scotland. My family connections are to the north and the west, and I have never had family living there. I have been

there, like many others, to catch a ferry to Ireland. If we can create a little magnet to deflect a few people from just driving straight to the ferry and instead get them to go to a place of interest at Whithorn, that would be well worth doing.

We have been able to make the island of Iona a place of cultural and spiritual heritage—when I have been there, it has been fair buzzing—even though it is actually quite difficult to get to. People have to take a ferry to Mull and then take a ferry from the other side of Mull to Iona. The Isle of Whithorn is a bit easier to get to, because the ferry there is free, as people can drive all the way.

This is a success story that is waiting for just a little bit of encouragement. I hope that the minister can tell us about some of the early steps that will turn it into a future success for Scotland, and for Whithorn and the south-west.

17:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I congratulate Aileen McLeod on securing the debate and on an excellent opening speech.

In response, I would like to make three points: first, that heritage tourism plays a vital role in Scotland's local and national visitor economy; secondly, that faith tourism is an important component of that; and thirdly, that by building on our existing partnerships, we can achieve even more.

I turn to the first of those themes. I am constantly impressed by the hard work, innovation and passion of all those who help to maintain Scotland's vibrant visitor economy. Their impact is huge. Direct spend by overnight visitors is estimated to be worth £4.3 billion and supports 185,000 jobs in our tourism growth sector. I was intrigued by the figures used by Adam Ingram on the relative spend of ecclesiastical tourists.

I am sure that members will not be surprised to learn that a large share of the sector is comprised of those wishing to experience our world-class heritage. VisitScotland's research bears that out, with 47 per cent of total visitors surveyed in 2011 choosing to visit an historic site. Heritage attractions now account for approximately one third of all visitor attractions in Scotland.

The heritage sector has been quick to embrace the Scottish Tourism Alliance's industry-led tourism Scotland 2020 strategy and is developing joint working with the sector in support of the Government's core purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. The strategy recognises that we need to focus our efforts on collaboration to develop experiences created by elements unique to Scotland, which cannot easily

be replicated by our competitors. Clearly, our historic environment has a big role to play.

As members have so eloquently stated this afternoon, Whithorn is unique; it is the only place in Scotland where evidence can be found of every phase of the development of Christianity, from the 5th century AD up to the reformation and beyond. That cultural significance has long been recognised. The site has been in state care for more than 100 years and continues to provide the community with a strong sense of identity, as well as attracting a small but significant number of visitors each year.

Whithorn has been an important place of pilgrimage since the 600s and a significant ecclesiastical and lordly centre grew up around the shrine of St Ninian. Ninian was recognised as one of the native patron saints of Scotland. By around 1200, a new monastery was founded around his shrine. The pilgrimage was created at the end of the 1800s and Whithorn is now properly recognised as the cradle of Christianity in Scotland. That was acknowledged in a members' business debate on 16 September 2009.

Joan McAlpine referred to the St Ninian's day parade, which my department was pleased to be able to help organise and, indeed, fund. It took place on St Ninian's day, which is when the Pope arrived in Edinburgh. Those members who visit St Andrews House will be aware that as they enter, on one side of the storm doors is St Columba and on the other side is St Ninian. That gives recognition to the place of St Ninian in our society.

I recognise that heritage and faith tourism to Whithorn is not a mass market. However, it is vital to the economic wellbeing of the area and has, in a small way, made Whithorn famous at an international level.

As we have heard, cultural routes are an excellent way of acknowledging the shared history, common links and stories that bind us to, and place us in, our historic environment. They are also a fascinating draw for visitors and locals alike and their value is far reaching.

The cultural routes programme was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987 to demonstrate how the heritage of different countries in Europe contributes to a shared cultural heritage. The Council of Europe has granted certification to 26 cultural routes. Those have been referred to today.

As members have noted, Cluniac sites in Europe, which include Paisley and Crossraguel abbeys in Scotland, received European cultural route certification in 2005. Historic Scotland is fully aware of the importance of developing those pan-European initiatives and became a member of the Cluniac federation.

On 14 May 2010, I had the pleasure of attending and speaking at a civic reception at Paisley abbey, hosted by Renfrewshire Council, to mark the 1,100th anniversary of the foundation of the Cluny order and abbey.

Historic Scotland has continued to engage with the federation by working to raise awareness of the medieval pilgrimage route through Ayrshire, which would have included Crossraguel and Glenluce abbeys and, as its final destination, Whithorn priory. Historic Scotland will continue to work in close partnership with the federation to promote our shared European cultural ties.

As members have noted, St Ninian ways is an initiative to develop all pilgrimage trails to Whithorn as a single entity. While gaining cultural route status is an admirable long-term aspiration, certification will depend on meeting the Council of Europe's criteria. Therefore, Aileen McLeod is correct to try to identify some of the initial steps that need to be taken as we proceed.

I will ask my officials in Historic Scotland to work alongside the other groups involved in assessing the feasibility of establishing ways to Whithorn and St Ninian as a European cultural route. I have as a minister previously explored some of the issues involved in the St Ninian ways initiative. The challenges that I would identify may be less to do with the heritage or tourism aspects of the project and more to do with land and transportation issues. Therefore, I will certainly engage the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse. Aileen McLeod is correct to identify that co-ordination will need to take place across agencies.

I draw to members' attention the Scottish pilgrimage gathering, which took place on 27 September 2013. At that conference, VisitScotland, which promotes Scotland's existing pilgrim routes on its website, recognised the importance of collaboration in the potential development of faith tourism in Scotland.

I firmly believe that through such partnership working and local initiatives we can embrace the opportunity presented to us by the faith tourism market. Such initiatives will benefit both Whithorn and the wider Dumfries and Galloway area in this our second century of caring for and promoting Scotland's cradle of Christianity.

I have visited Whithorn and am very enthusiastic about the passion that people express for the area. However, there is more of this story to tell in terms of engaging people. We must think about the practical ways forward. By bringing this debate, Aileen McLeod has managed to bring together the chamber. We must think about what we can do and work co-operatively to try to take the initiative forward. It will not be without its

challenges, but at least if we know what they are,
we can embrace and address them.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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