

**Meeting with Claire Whitten, Special Advisor to the Committee of the Centre**

Monday 29 October 2001 at 10.30am in the ONIEB.

Present: Tony Canavan  
Claire Whitten  
William Dukelow  
Stella McArdle

Claire stressed that the meeting was an informal opportunity for her to gain an understanding of the role and work of the Brussels office.

Tony explained in some detail the 4 core aims of the office namely:

- monitor policy developments at European Union level, ensuring that Northern Ireland Ministers and Departments have up-to-date information, comply with legal responsibilities and benefit from European initiatives;
- ensure that Northern Ireland interests are taken fully into account in the work of the European institutions and in the development of UK policy on EU matters;
- raise the positive profile of Northern Ireland among European policy-makers and opinion-formers;
- pursue co-operation of practical benefit to Northern Ireland with other European regions.

At each stage Claire was offered the opportunity of asking questions and the following issues were raised:

- target setting and evaluation e.g. how do you know whether you have influenced people.
- the nature of the office's relationship with UKRep. Tony stressed the usefulness of being within the 'Ukrep family'.
- the office's ability to influence the UK position on a matter of policy.
- the office's role in identifying and developing opportunities for inter-regional linkages.
- the extent of the office's dealings with NI MEPs.
- what we achieve through our relationship with the Scottish and Welsh offices.

**William J Dukelow**

7 November 2001

## **BRIEFING FOR THE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRE: UKRep; UK National Parliament Office**

### **UKRep**

There are 120 staff in the UK Permanent Representation to the EU, two-thirds of them originally UK based diplomats and civil servants, and the rest locally recruited. Giles Paxman, who will be hosting the lunch on 29 October (in the absence of the Permanent Representative and his Deputy at Council meetings in Luxembourg), is a Counsellor-grade career diplomat in charge of the Political and Institutional Affairs section of UKRep. This has responsibility for longer range and cross-cutting issues, such as EU institutional reform, devolution, openness and transparency, and future development of the Union. Giles also supervises the Press and personnel functions of UKRep, as well as the section which deals with the European Parliament.

### **UK National Parliament Office**

Nick Walker took up duties last month as UK National Parliament Representative to the European Parliament. He is a career official in the Clerks Department at Westminster. Many of the Union's national Parliaments have sent representatives to the EP in a liaison capacity. His duties particularly involve monitoring the progress of EP reports and legislation for Westminster Select Committees. He also facilitates visits to the EP by Westminster Parliamentarians. His assistant, Jennifer Harrison, is of Northern Ireland origin.

## **BRIEFING FOR THE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRE: GOVERNANCE**

In July the Commission published a White Paper on Governance of the European Union. This was the culmination of an exercise which has been going on for some time, though latterly its subject matter has been subsumed to some extent into the Future of Europe debate.

The White Paper proposes a strengthened hand for the European Parliament in co-decision and emphasizes the Commission's status as guardian of the Treaty and the institution with the right to initiate policy.

There is a specific section on regional authorities. It states that there should be greater multi-party partnership between the Union, member states, regions and cities. National governments do not adequately involve regions in preparing their positions on EU policies. The Commission proposes:

- Systematic dialogue with European and national associations of regional and local government;
- Greater flexibility in implementing legislation and programmes with strong territorial impact;
- Possible use of tripartite contracts under which regions would undertake to deliver specific EU policy objectives;
- Overall policy coherence.

The rest of the White Paper stresses proper consultation and a role for civil society, openness, accountability and greater understanding of the Union. It is now out for consultation until 31 March 2002.

The text of the White Paper is available at [www.europa.eu.int/comm/governance](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/governance)

## EU ENLARGEMENT

Reuniting Europe after the divisions of the Cold War will benefit the UK; the UK supports enlargement and is actively working to secure it. The applicant countries for enlargement are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta.

### Enlargement will

- Enhance European stability and security
- More UK prosperity: Independent research estimates that UK GDP would be boosted by £1.75 billion by enlargement.
- More UK jobs: Survey by European Round Table of Industrialists (published 8 June) estimates that enlargement will create 300,000 jobs across EU.
- More UK trade: UK businesses will have access to Single Market of 500 million consumers (larger than US and Japan combined).
- Help combat common problems such as environmental pollution, cross-border crime, illegal immigration.

UK is a champion of EU enlargement. In Warsaw last October, Prime Minister called for first new Member States to take part in next European Parliament elections in 2004. Gothenburg European Council (June) set early target dates for ending negotiations (end 2002) and for the first accessions (the new Member States should participate, as Members, in the 2004 European Parliament Elections).

The "road map" for negotiations agreed at Nice European Council last December has been exceeded. EU agreed its position on all 9 negotiating chapters allocated by the roadmap to the Swedish Presidency, including the difficult dossiers of free movement of people, capital and the environment.

Northern Ireland is already working with one of the applicant countries – Bulgaria. Under the EU 'twinning' project, NICO, on behalf of the NI public sector, is currently assisting Bulgaria build

capacity to do economic appraisals and environmental action appraisals for transport and environmental projects likely to be eligible for support from the Structural Funds. ('Twinning' is the principal tool of EU assistance for the institutional building process of governments of EU candidate countries. Its purpose is to help the development of modern and efficient administrations, with structures, human resources and management skills.)

Northern Ireland may also be able to contribute from its own experience to resolving some of the problems of Eastern European countries with ethnic divisions and inadequate structures for protecting human and minority rights.