

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 19th August 2014, 6.30pm

Committee Room 4

Next Meeting

Tuesday, 7th October 2014, 5.30pm

Committee Room 4

Attendees

Colin Beattie MSP
Cameron Buchanan MSP
Stefan Büttner (via Skype)
Manuela Calchini, VisitScotland
John Clifford, Consul of Austria
Anja Glante, Scottish Parliament
Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Consul General of Germany
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament
Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy
Georg Karabaczek, Austrian Embassy
Barbara Kaulbach, Goethe Institut
Colin Keir MSP
Maureen Watt MSP

Apologies Annette Götzkes, Peter Müller McDougall, John Pentland MSP, Barbara Strickland, Sigrid Rieuwerts, James Trolland, Petra Wend

Colin Beattie (CB) opened the meeting at 18.30, and noted that the later time was due to late-running Parliamentary business.

Topics Discussed:

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Colin Beattie went through the minutes. There were no changes to be made. CB noted that the group would discuss the action points at a later date.

The group approved the minutes.

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Presentation by Georg Karabaczek, Trade Commissioner and Commercial Counsellor, Austrian Embassy

CB welcomed Georg Karabaczek (GK) to the meeting. GK gave a presentation to the group on the role of energy policy and renewables in Austria. GK noted that Austria's renewable energy target for 2020 is 34%, and that at present renewable energy sits at 32.2%.

GK gave the example of the town of Güssing which, in the late 1980s, took steps to become more energy efficient and to produce its own energy to cut costs. This reduced energy consumption by around 50%. Güssing subsequently became the first community in the European Union to cut carbon emissions by more than 90%.

GK stressed the importance of local regions and communities taking renewable initiatives into their own hands, using a range of renewables including biomass and wind. GK noted that the aim should be to keep consumption the same level until 2020.

GK spoke about the 'passive house' standard and its development in Austria. This was partly due to stricter laws and also more funding being available for people to insulate and retro-fit their houses. GK also mentioned that a tidal power project in Islay was built in collaboration with Andritz, an Austrian technology company with an office in Glasgow.

GK took questions from the CPG. CB asked if there was a system in Europe to provide a better roof space to minimise damp. GK said it was a question of having the correct ventilation in place; a proper heat exchange system helps with this.

Maureen Watt (MW) asked how the building industry in Austria was encouraged to comply with the stringent building laws. GK said the financial incentives in place were only given when builders adhered strictly to the rules. GK further noted that skilled labour was key to ensuring that high standards were maintained.

John Clifford (JC) mentioned that part of the ventilation systems in Austria took air in from further underground, which can increase the temperature by 4°C. MW asked if this was an air source heat pump. GK said this was a simpler system as air just exchanges, with the warm air going out heating up the cold air that's coming in.

CB asked what heat and electricity sources local communities used. GK said on small scales energy sources would be things like biomass, due to the predominance of high quality wood, and also solar heat. GK noted that wood fuels were a mixture of pellets, chip and wood blocks. CB asked if they needed to import wood. GK said generally not as there is a lot of wood in Austria.

Manuela Calchini (MC) asked if there were any issues with windfarms and their effect on tourism. GK said there can be but decisions on windfarms are generally taken at a regional level.

CB asked what 'black liquors' were. MW said that it was a byproduct from the papermaking process.

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CB expressed surprise that there was not more use of solar power for heat energy. GK noted that the percentage was 1.9% of renewable energy for heat, and that he too was surprised by its low level.

CB asked if there were any hydro micro-projects. GK said there are, such as on the Danube, but they are not that important. CB asked if ground source heat pumps were in use. GK said that ground source and air source heat pumps are taking off, with about 200,000 pumps installed at present. Colin Keir (CK) asked if there was any disruption to the Danube pumps when floods occurred. GK mentioned that the pumps can't be run during floods and therefore less energy is produced.

CK asked how successful international partnerships had been. GK noted that the biomass projects were largely Austrian but projects such as hydro-power had involved partnerships with German companies. GK mentioned that Austrian companies spend around 10% on research and development in order to stay ahead of the field.

JC noted that, due to a predominance of wood-built houses, Austria had a lot of very high quality sawdust to convert into pellets, and that the quality of pellets is key in biomass energy. Pellets are preferable to woodchip as the latter still has bark, making burning more difficult.

CK asked if there was any specific focus in selling to countries abroad. GK said that biomass boilers are the strongest market, but there was a need to find a partner with the skill to sell the boilers. Biogas was also a strong market, alongside solar energy for heat.

CK asked if Austria had an equivalent of Scottish Enterprise to target Ministerial visits to other countries. GK mentioned that Austria has a very similar equivalent that they work closely with to promote trade.

CB thanked GK for attending the meeting.

AOB

Colin Beattie held over the AOB until the next meeting, and closed the meeting at 19.18.