



Cross Party Group on Poland
Wednesday, 06 March 2019
Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 3

Minutes

I. Attendance:

1. Conveners: MSP Claire Baker, MSP Joan McAlpine
2. Members: Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation Ivan McKee MSP

Present: Iwona Jurkowska; Teresa Collins; Ewelina Lukaszek; Joanna Ulatowska; Monika Ciska; Tomasz Lotarewicz; Chris Sagan; Margot Sagan; George Rubiński; Magda Czarnecka; John M. Lassa; Gary Guicaan; John Bates; Robert L. Hodgart; Ewa McKee; David Worthington, Keith Mullins MacIntyre; Stephan Mahill, Antony Kozłowski, Sylwia Kiro Żabińska MacIntyre; Sylwia Spooner.

3. Apologies: Zofia Wierzbowicz-Fraser, Krystyna Szumelukowa, David Worthington, Dorota Peszkowska

II. Meeting:

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation Ivan McKee will give an update on Brexit

Minister Ivan McKee answers to the questions which were sent before meeting:

- a. Question 1: The reservoir of talent in Scotland which has developed since Poland entered the EU in 2004 has developed substantially within the Polish community which is a “win win” situation if stronger bilateral links are encouraged between the two countries. What would be the proposals of the Scottish Government to strengthen economic links between the two countries post Brexit?

Minister Ivan McKee said that he was on a ministerial visit to Poland in January 2019. The Scottish Government sees Poland as a very important

market and wants to increase focus on it. Scotland doesn't have a direct presence through Scottish Development international (SDI) in Poland at the moment but the expectation is that there will be permanent Scottish trade presence in Poland in future. Poland is the fastest growing economy in Europe and the Scottish Government sees Poland as one of the top countries globally for Scottish business to work with. One of the key focus of Mr. McKee's visit was the renewable energy sector, he had meetings with Polish businesses and the Polish Government.

- b. Question 2 : At the end of the academic year 2018 there were 218 Polish students at Edinburgh University some of whom are enrolled through the "Polish Medical School'. They are a sample of the EU students enrolled at all Scottish Universities and for whom there is a guarantee of continuity of Scottish Government Funding towards tuition fees for the academic year post Brexit. What would be the policy of the Scottish Government towards future EU nationals as opposed to non-EU nationals in respect of tuition fees and would there be scope for bilateral funding between Scotland and Poland to support Polish students in Scotland and to encourage student and staff exchanges between Scotland and Poland?

The Scottish Government hugely values having so many international students in Scotland. EU students who start their education in Scotland in 2020 will have free education till the end of their course. The position beyond that will be reviewed going forward in relation to Brexit updates. This policy is connected with immigration policy which is reserved to the UK government. UK government has made statements that international students can stay in the UK for 3 years which is problematic for Scotland where courses typically last for 4 years. The Scottish Government is pushing back to try and make sure that international students can stay in Scotland for the full duration of 4 year courses.

- c. Question 3 : 15000 Polish children in the Scottish Education system seek recognition for their native language. In order to reassure these young people will the Scottish Government support the introduction of SQA examinations in the Polish language?

The Scottish Government understands the concern and desires of the Polish community and the Polish government in this area. There is still ongoing discussion within the Scottish government on this issue so it is not possible to give any clear answer on this at the moment.

- d. Question 4: The First Minister has previously stated that the voting rights which can be determined by the Scottish Parliament should be based on residency and not citizenship. The voting rights of EU nationals post Brexit is not yet settled and opinions are being expressed in England that all voting rights should be withdrawn. Can the Minister confirm the intention to put forward an Electoral Franchise Bill which will allow EU nationals to vote in

local elections and for the Scottish Parliament on the basis of residency rather than the status of their citizenship?

Scottish Government approach is to keep all voting rights. EU citizens have full rights to vote in Scottish elections and we want to continue it. Government will introduce an Electoral Franchise Bill for Scotland which will protect the rights of EU citizens.

Comments:

Brexit makes a huge impact on the Polish community. Lack of stability and lack of control of their destiny, which is the biggest stress factor in their lives, creates a fear of the cost of Brexit, whether if they leave to see families in Poland they can come back to UK, and the fear of offensive behaviour from British communities. Poles appreciate the good intentions of Scottish Government, but good intention is one thing and what happen nobody knows. They try to secure their position either by applying for British citizenship or getting stability by deciding to go back to Poland. The Polish administration could provide to all Poles very simple explanation what to do. The most important is to have the citizenship. It would be good to tell people if Polish government recognises dual citizenship and gives more guidance. The proper legal status gives less stress to families.

Sylwia Spooner informed that there is information on Polish Consulate website. There are a number of events, Polish Embassy and Consulate organize in terms of Brexit. Poland allows dual nationalities.

The Vice consul informed the meeting that as representatives of Polish Embassy they talk a lot to the Home Office and underline these fears. We have to remember that there is a scheme of registration of settled status and it is the scheme of the Home Office. The role of Polish administration is also to check if this scheme is clear and accessible.

Feniks representatives informed that they applied to the Home Office for a grant to secure communities at risk – the victims of domestic abuse, homeless people, and people who aren't able to apply for settled status because they don't have enough documents and ability to do it themselves.

Polish Consulate estimate that there are 99,000 Polish citizens in Scotland. There is some information from Polish communities that some people want to leave Scotland. There is no information if they want to come back to Poland or go to different countries. The Polish economy has a shortage of workers and the Polish government would be more than happy if all Polish people came back to Poland.

The Polish Consulate organizes promotional events where people can learn more about Poland and encourage people to visit Poland. There is information on the consulate website about Polish classes. All suggestions and projects are more than welcome, and the consulate is able to provide some financial support.

3. Approval of the Minutes from the meeting on 27 November 2018

The Minutes from the meeting were approved. Proposed by Antony Kozolowski and seconded by Czeslaw Kruk.

4. Matters arising:

Response from Clare Haughey Minister for Mental Health regarding CPG on Poland email from 22 of November 2018 highlighting the report “The review of Suicides in Polish People Living in Scotland”

The group agreed to reply to Minister Haughey’s letter and requesting that the report could be presented to the leadership group.

5. CPG on Poland Facebook group – Sylwia Kiro Zabinska-MacIntyre

The Facebook group is established but it is very hard to add people to the group because Facebook requires personal profiles not public profiles. The group is established as a top secret, so is not visible on Facebook and only people who are added can see it. The question is if everybody has a personal profile and would be happy to be added to the group.

Agreed that it will be “closed group” not “top secret group”. People will be added to the group after checking with the secretary if they are a member of CPG on Poland.

Secretary will check with Cross Party Office if we comply with GDPR rules. Secretary will also update the mailing list. The new members of the group will be approved before joining the CPG on Poland.

Antony Kozlowski raised concern about Facebook security and manipulation by outside influences.

6. Sub-groups’ reports

Updates from Sub-committees:

Culture group – Keith Macintyre Scottish Polish Culture Association. The events – February “Robert Burns and the Romantics” which included extracts from Adam Mickiewicz and Seweryn Goszczyński; Scottish Polish Culture Association Annual General Meeting – 8th April; Annual Dinner Dance – 11th May

3 of April exhibition on Robert Porteus opens in Inverness, and moves on 3rd May to Aberdeen Arts Centre.

Sylwia Kiro Źabińska-MacIntyre asked for ideas to get any kind of sponsorship from the Scottish side to promote Scottish culture to Polish people. Suggestion was to contact Polish academics who research Scotland and organize conferences every two years. There could be an opportunity to organise an exhibition about Scotland in Poland. To encourage Polish children to take part in some dancing classes, playing bands, pipes. The organization called 'Care for a Ceilidh' which is focused on bringing modern concept of Ceilidhs into care homes can be approach to help to organise some Ceilidhs in different environment like Polish schools.

The new Polish Club in Edinburgh will be opened by May 2020 and it will be an opportunity for different Polish groups to join and create some culture proposal.

The Polish Association in Aberdeen has organised Polish Scottish Ceillidh events.

Mental Health – Magda Czerwinska updated on the mental health charity Feniks work. They see the increase of emergency appointments by people who need help with emergency calls (suicide, violence). Fenix has received a grant from Consulate so they could respond to this need. The grant will be continuing this year as well. We were approach by "See Me" - organization working with mental health stigma - to organize social campaign addressed to Polish men to understand what could help them to reach for help. Not asking for support is the main problem within this group. Feniks has also received 3 years funding from Edinburgh City Council to help people who are in very difficult life and economic situation. They applied together with the EU Citizens Rights project for Home Office funding to be able to support EU citizens to apply for settled status. In partnership with Robert Gordon University, Feniks is involved in an ongoing project to check what kind of impact Brexit has on mental health of EU citizens. On 17th March Feniks is planning a Women's Day with a whole day of workshops for women.

Polish Education Committee (PEC) – The "No Boundaries School" presented its own tartan in November 2018. It is the first tartan of the Polish Saturday schools in the world, specially designed for the school. The colours signify: red and white for Poland, white and blue for Scotland, brown for Wojtek the bear, and green for Polish soldiers' uniforms.

On 9th March the "No Boundaries School" is organizing Polish dictation competition in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Sylwia Spooner said that the Consulate previously estimated that there were more than 13 000 Polish pupils in primary and secondary schools in Scotland, but they don't have the current numbers. CPG agreed to contact local authorities to ask if they collect this type of information.

Sylwia Spooner updated on SQA examination progress. Cabinet Secretary John Sweeney promised to review the situation once again as the Scottish Government is open to the idea that Polish will be included in SQA examinations. However, the Scottish Qualification Authority aren't ready to prepare the examination in Polish. Some materials are already prepared by Elwira Grossman and the people who works with her at the Glasgow University. Sylwia Spooner proposed to write a letter from CPG to Cabinet Secretary to ask for support to move on. The reason given by SQA is the financial cost of providing the examination and lack of registered Polish teachers in Scotland.

Antony Kozlowski underlined that materials are already ready in England so Scotland can use them in very easy way. CPG should underline the value of Polish language for Scottish trade to convince Scottish authorities to introduce Polish as a part of SQA examinations.

CPG agreed to discuss the next step after collecting numbers and contact with Zofa Wierzbowicz Fraser who is the PEC chairman.

7. Date of the next meeting

Next meeting: 17:30 on 12th June 2019 with guest speaker Polish Consul

8. Any Other Business

Members are asked to propose ideas for dates and speakers for meetings for the next Parliamentary year.

9. Meeting Close

The meeting closed at 14:30