

Scottish Parliament
Cross Party Group on Poland Meeting
Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 1.00-2.30 pm, Committee Room 1

MINUTES

In attendance:

Co-Conveners

Claire Baker MSP, Scottish Labour
Maree Todd MSP, Scottish National Party

MSPs

Ivan McKee MSP, Scottish National Party
David Torrance MSP, Scottish National Party
John Mason MSP, Scottish National Party

Speaker

Magda Czarnecka, Feniks

Members

Dobrawa Jezior, Secretary
Sylwia Spooner, Consulate General of the Republic of Poland
Krystyna Szumelukowa, Brexit and Beyond
Pat Reid, Falkirk Council
Grażyna Freni, Zielony Balonik
Joanna Zawadzka, Polish Cultural Festival Association
Dorota Peszkowska, Emito.net
Joanna Peters
Julia Pisarek, Consulate General of the Republic of Poland
Anna Szymczuk, Consulate General of the Republic of Poland
Tomek Borkowy, Universal Arts
Hugh McMahan
Bartłomiej Kowalczyk, Polish Business Link
Anna Drogon, Polish Business Link
Pawel Kopeć, Polish Cultural Festival Association
George Rubiński, Scottish Polish Cultural Association
Robert Hodgart
Dr John Bates, Polish Education Committee, University of Glasgow
Czesław Kruk, Scottish National Party
Kiva Richard, Scottish Parliament
Anna Bruch
Elżbieta Bruch

1. Welcome from the Co-Convenor, Claire Baker MSP

Claire Baker MSP welcomed Members to the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Poland and invited Magda Czarnecka to present the research on Polish suicides results.

2. Apologies

Danny Boyle, BEMIS

Anna Ruszel, Polish Professional Forum

Dr Karin Friedrich, University of Aberdeen

Dr David Worthington, University of Highlands and Islands

Katarzyna Jajszczok, Fife Free Press

Dr Izabela Czekaj, Polish Social and Educational Society in Glasgow

Consul Tomasz Tadla, Consulate General of the Republic of Poland

Zofia Wierzbowicz-Fraser, Polish Education Committee

Dr Elwira Grossman, Polish Education Committee

Dr Beata Kohlbek, Polish Education Committee

Dr Andrew Roach, Polish Education Committee

Ela O'Neill, Polish Education Committee

Dr Anna Martowicz, Polish Education Committee, APPLA

Maciej Dokurno, Fife Migrants Forum

Antony Kozlowski, Polish Social and Educational Society in Glasgow

Monika Ciska, Gazeta Polonijna

Izabella Brodzińska, Scottish Polish Cultural Association

Sylwia Kiro Żabinska-MacIntyre, Process Walk, Feniks, Scottish Polish Cultural Association

Michael Borland, Scottish Polish Cultural Association

Violeta Ilendo, Fife Polish Education Trust

Grant Robertson, Police Scotland

3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of last meeting of CPG on Poland were approved after the presentation.

4. Magda Czarnecka, Feniks, 'Polish Suicides in Lothian and Scotland 2012-2016' - presentation of the research results, discussion and action planning

The presentation highlighted the problem of high suicide rates among the Polish population living in Scotland.

According to the Scottish Census, 86,000 Polish nationals live in Scotland, and majority of them are aged 25-34. The suicide rate in the Polish community reflects the suicide rate in Poland, which is much higher than in Scotland. (The ratio in Scotland is 12.8 per 100,000, while in Poland it equals 18 per 100,000) The research suggests that the suicide rate for Polish nationals in Scotland is likely to be a little above the level in Poland.

The results also show that 90% of suicides are committed by men. The mean age of people committing suicide for men is 37.0, and for women is 32.8.

The presentation included a description the chosen methods and reasons for committing suicide. The most common method is hanging. Potential factors contributing to the suicides were related to unemployment, financial problems, shift and manual work, the existence of a language barrier,

feelings of isolation, and heavy use of alcohol (40% of people were diagnosed with alcohol problems, and in another 40% of cases 'drink was mentioned' in the notes describing the suicide).

What is surprising, most of the people who committed suicide lived with their partners. One of the main problems identified by the research was a refusal to seek help and take advantage of the available Scottish services and the NHS. In many cases people did not visit their doctors even though they were registered with their GP. The possible reasons for this were often the language barrier, or the fact that they are receiving medical care back in Poland. In many cases even when they were contacting their GP, they never mentioned any mental health problems, only physical ones.

Another big problem is lack of awareness among family members and friends, and a lack knowledge pertaining to how to react when seeing warning signals. The presentation ended with a question about possible solution to the problem of a high suicide rate among Poles living in Scotland.

Discussion

Tomek Borkowy - One of the biggest problems is that many of the Poles living in Scotland cannot speak English - this results in social isolation and an inability to communicate their problems. The main issues is connected with possible ways of improving language skills.

Hugh McMahon – Clarification needed - Why is the suicide rate in Poland so high? Just how high is it?

Magda Czarnecka: High suicide rates are visible in the post-communist countries. There is a much higher suicide rate among males than females, which is perhaps explained by women coping with life problems differently, and being more likely to seek support. However, the suicide rate is just the tip of the iceberg. Social changes occurring in Poland, which has traditionally been a patriarchal society, lead to a masculinity crisis with which many men are unable to cope.

Joanna Zawadzka – the NHS should be better educated to recognize warning signs and deal with people, especially immigrants, seeking or in need of mental care.

Czeslaw Kruk - Everyone who migrates to another country is obligated to learn the language. Therefore, it is not right to blame NHS for not being able to provide the service in Polish. Tax payers' money goes towards paying for translators, and Polish people feel like they don't have to learn English.

Robert Hodgart: Is emergency help available for issues relating to mental health problems? Is there any offer of help that would be available as with physical health emergencies?

Maree Todd MSP: Not only the language barrier is a problem, but also the cultural barrier. If Poles wanted to seek help, they would, despite language problems. The issue is that they do not know how to get help, and they do not seek it at all. There is a difference between men and women in terms of coping mechanisms, a difference which is also tied to language.

Sylwia Spooner – It should be noted that many of the people affected were not registered with a GP, were not scheduling visits. Therefore, educating the NHS won't help. We should educate Polish people on how to reach out for help.

Dorota Peszkowska: Most of the people who committed suicides were living in deprived areas, so maybe it is not the problem of Polish community, but a general problem of deprived areas in Scotland.

Joanna Zawadzka – An interesting and perhaps worthwhile “language café model” has been implemented in Fife.

Magda Czarnecka: What is interesting is that, though people who come to Scotland are responsible for learning English, the NHS in Scotland puts great emphasis on human rights and wants to extend its services to everyone. Polish people in Scotland should be able to seek help. Moreover, many of those people are not immigrants anymore. They are citizens, who have been for often more than ten years, work here, have houses etc.

Claire Baker MSP: Possible action we can take is writing to the Health Minister. We can also pressure data collection agencies to record the nationality of people, who commit suicide.

George Rubiński: Integration within a community is very important. People should have open access to language lessons. The courses should be flexible, because people often miss classes due to work or travel abroad, and then drop the whole course because they are not able to catch up. The language café model would be best.

Claire Baker MSP: This is a good idea, and sounds similar to the conversational cafes mentioned earlier (by **Joanna Zawadzka**).

5. Sub-committees

a) Update from the Brexit and Beyond group, Krystyna Szumelukowa

The group met on June 20 2017 to discuss events following the calling of the General Election on June 8 2017.

The engagement of MSPs with representatives of civic society through the Cross Party Group is an excellent model. A standing item on the agenda for the Polish Consul General to give an update on relevant issues/events would be welcomed.

The first UK/EU meeting concluded with the agreement of the Terms of Reference for the Article 50 Treaty of the European Union negotiations. It was agreed that two initial negotiating groups would be established to consider Citizens’ Rights and the Financial Settlement. The second meeting is scheduled for the week commencing July 17 2017. It is expected that negotiations will be concluded by October 2018 to allow for the political approval processes to proceed with the UK exiting the EU on March 29 2019.

Calls for “a place at the negotiating table” by the Scottish Government have so far been rejected. It is unclear whether EU nationals residing in the UK will be covered by any future agreement. The EU position, handed to the UK’s EU Ambassador on June 12 2017, is that EU nationals should retain all the rights they currently hold, for life. A response from the UK government is awaited. It is not clear how far the UK government will go in guaranteeing all the rights of EU citizens beyond residency. British residents have also called for rights regarding citizenship, employment, freedom of movement with the EU, healthcare, pensions and social benefits. Information should be collated and

presented to MPs elected on June 8 2017. The Scottish Parliamentary Committee on Europe and External Affairs can also be a conduit for raising awareness of the complexity of issues being faced by EU Nationals.

We agreed to hold our next meeting towards the end of August as the third round of UK/EU negotiations are due to commence in the week beginning August 28 2017 after a second round in the week of July 17 2017. In the interim we will follow up on action points and the sharing of information.

b) Update from the Business group, Anna Drogon and Bartek Kowalczyk, Polish Business Link

Anna informed those present of plans for the subcommittee and business development in Scotland to become more sector specific.

Bartek voiced concerns shared by employers in Scotland connected to Brexit, regarding access to workers and changes in taxes. Also, distributors are needed for three Polish companies, which would like to cooperate with businesses in Scotland and expand into the Scottish market – for example a producer of barbeques from Poznań.

c) Update from the Culture group, Joanna Zawadzka, PCFA

Joanna shared information about the Scottish Tartan Festival, which took place in early June and will be concluded by the announcement of the winner of a tartan design contest. Five designs of a tartan pattern for the city of Kraków were shared with its citizens, who will choose their favorite at the end of the month. A short documentary is being made in connection with the Festival, showcasing the process of designing and producing a pattern for Kraków.

A piano recital featuring Rafał Blechacz, winner of the 15th International Chopin Piano Competition, will take place on 28 June 2017. Tickets are available at the Queen's Hall Box Office, where the event will be taking place.

Grażyna Fremi, Zielony Balonik – Polish authors and their works, translated into English, will be showcased at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, taking place between the 12 and 28 August 2017.

Paweł Kopeć – a trip to Mapa Scotland is being organised, those participating will visit the model of the city of Edinburgh and the Walter Scott House.

Krystyna Szumelukowa gave an update on the progress made in the restoration of the SPK Building at 11 Drummond Place.

d) Education - update from the Education group, Sylwia Spooner

The campaign, led by the Polish Education Committee (PEC), that aims to establish examinations (Highers and Advance Highers) and introduce the Polish language into the mainstream education system in Scotland is being continued. Compared to a year ago – there has been substantial progress, but Polish is still not on the curriculum and there are no examinations in Polish except those in the English system: A-levels and GCSEs - we are still trying to convince the SQA to create the examination.

There are Polish teachers now registered with GTCS and ready to teach the Polish language. Dr Beata Kohlbeek recently joined the National Parents Forum for Scotland and will take an active role on EAL, MFL, registration of teachers from overseas etc. We encourage parents to get more involved in the Parents Councils at schools. More Polish language learning units are being prepared by Dr Elwira Grossman and Ann Robertson (on Wojtek the Bear).

There are plans to organize events (for Scottish schools) to promote the use of the Polish language learning materials that already exist. The website Emito.net is kindly running an information campaign on the benefits of bilingualism. There are also plans to launch a petition to get support for the idea of teaching Polish at Scottish schools. We still promote the idea of bilingualism through leaflets prepared by APPLA (Association for the Promotion of Polish Language Abroad) - "Give your child the gift of your native language". APPLA is working on infographics (with info about the Polish language, basic information about the Polish alphabet etc.) that will be available for download from their website.

Polish Saturday Schools are growing, more schools are being registered and more children are attending the ones that already exist. There are also after school clubs run by APPLA. There are some materials available for teaching Polish at Scottish schools: through Glow, and the National Improvement Hub through the Scottish Education website. Also, quite a few Polish children use online courses to learn Polish. More Polish schools are preparing children for Polish A-levels and GCSE exams. Aberdeen Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council are interested in GCSEs in Polish. There are also plans to run a pilot project in Glasgow, where Polish would be introduced into mainstream education. Mrs Ela O'Neill runs Polish taster classes (Balfour High). There were training courses run for Polish teachers.

There are discussions started by Dr Elwira regarding the possibility of creating an examination center in Glasgow (University of Glasgow) that would award certificates for learners of Polish (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, lowest B1)

There were meetings between the Polish Minister of Education Mrs Anna Zalewska and Cabinet Secretary John Swinney and Minister Nick Gibb.

e) Update from the Support group, Magda Czarnecka – the issue of domestic violence is being worked on, the way this problem is perceived is different in Scotland and in Poland. Also, Feniks will soon be celebrating its 10th anniversary.

6. AOB

There were no other matters of current business raised.

7. Date of the next meeting: 27 September 2017, 1.00 – 2.30 pm