

Cross Party Group on Poland

Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019

Scottish Parliament Committee Room 3

## **Minutes**

### **1 Attendance :**

1. Conveners : MSP Claire baker (CB),MSP Joan McAlpine (JM)

2.Members : MSP John Mason, (JMa) MSP Maureen Watt (MW)

3. Present : Robert Frost (RF), Krystyna Szumelukowa (KS),Cllr Ashley Graczyk (AG)

Stephanie Jammer (SJ), Michal Zawisza (MZ), Sylwia Spooner (SS) ,Dobrawa Jezior (DJ)  
Ireneusz Truskowski (IT) Beata Kohlbek (BK) Chris Sagan (CS) Margot Sagan (MS),

Joanna Peters (JP), Monika Ciska (MC),Anna Pytliks (AP), Olivia Willis (OW)

Mark Johnson (MJ), Ewa Rogos Chuchro (EC), Justyna Majewska (JM) Zosia Fraser (ZF)

4. Apologies : David Worthington, Andrew Roach , Pat Glacken

### **11 Meeting :**

1. Welcome and Introduction CB

2. Approval of Minutes from meeting of CPG held on 12/6/2019 proposed by MS and seconded by BK . The Minutes have been approved .

### **Speaker :**

The Consul-General of the Republic of Poland -Mr Ireneusz Truskowski :

Mr Truskowski stated that he has been in Scotland for 2 years, and apologised for not being present at previous meetings . He went on to list the institutions and individuals with whom the Consulate has worked over the years and to thank them for their continued support and contribution: The University of Glasgow and Dr Elwira Grossman and her work on developing Polish language materials and members of the Polish Education Committee headed by Zosia Fraser; Dr Maria Dlugolecka-Graham –co-ordinator for the Polish School of Medicine who is involved in the Paderewski Lecture series; Professor Robert Frost and Professor Karin Friedrich on their work on many projects; The City of Edinburgh Council and Lords Provosts for support in the Consular efforts and initiatives; Lady Brigid McEwan and her support of Duns- Zagan links; Fife Council; The Provost of Perth ; The Bailie of West Dunbartonshire; All the Polish and Scottish/Polish cultural and business organisations,

support organisations, Saturday schools and Scouts , and all who work together in this forum to strengthen Scottish/ Polish links.

Mr Truskowski thanked the Members of Parliament and those who carried the work of the Secretariat .He mentioned that the Polish Consulate-General is the busiest of the European Consulates in Scotland ,with over one hundred thousand Poles .He expressed gratitude that the parliamentarians in Scotland acknowledge the challenges migrant communities are faced with . Around 30 Polish communities are most active in Scotland, with over 25 Polish Saturday Schools and after school clubs being run. At the Millenium there were very few Poles in Scotland and there were discussions about closing the Consular offices in Edinburgh. Links between Poland and Scotland had begun to fade. Everything changed in 2004 when Poland joined the European Union. The Consulate IS considering further expansion and is excited by the enthusiasm for co-operation from the Scottish side on numerous projects.

The Consul –General went on to introduce his colleagues from the Consular staff who were present –Consul Michal Zawisza ,head of the Legal section, who also has responsibility for consular help, Sylwia Spooner (Head of Cultural Affairs ) with the assistance of Dobrawa Jezior works with the Polish diaspora organisations and schools delivering public diplomacy projects and communications strategies .

Mr Truskowski said how delighted he was to be able to work with the Parliamentarians, the Scottish Government, local authorities, institutions and organisations. He said “We intend to continue the cooperation on many levels and hope the openness that we experience now will remain and lead to great projects and important collaborations in the future.”

Next year will be another year of important anniversaries for us:

- 35 years since the establishment of the Consular office in Edinburgh,
- the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation of Auschwitz Bikenau,
- 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw also called the Miracle of the Vistula,
- 450th anniversary of the creation of the Polish Lithuanian Union,
- we want to remind people that it is 102 years since Poland regained its independence,
- and also the Chopin Year with another Chopin competition being held in Poland, while the links of Chopin with Scotland are very important and we work on trying to highlight them whenever we can,
- we are also working on delivering a Scottish Polish business forum.

In 2021, which will be his last year here, the Consul-General said we are

Already talking to a number of local partners as we hope to mark 80 years since the Clydebank Blitz.

We cannot mark all these important anniversaries alone and are grateful to all of our local partners and the Polish organisations for their involvement.

- Olivia Willis (OW) of the Polish Professionals Forum mentioned she was involved in professional co-operation between Poland and Scotland, and that Edinburgh had recently re-visited and signed the Krakow /Edinburgh partnership agreement .
- Sylwia Spooner (SS) commented on the challenges of arranging the re-signing and the cordial arrangements now in place. She went on to say that the museum in Fife has a collection of WW2 Polish memorabilia ,and that a statue of the Polish Commander-in –Chief General Wladyslaw Sikorski could be found in Kinburn Park . Thanks were offered to the Polish Museum Committee in Fife . Also , an unmarked grave of the Polish |General Mikolaj Osikowski was discovered at Hayfield Cemetery in Kirkcaldy .

A successful book compiling artistic achievements of soldiers serving under General Anders has been launched in Glasgow

- Krystyna Szumelukowa (KS) spoke of the need to celebrate the Scottish/Polish bilateral links, and mentioned that the Scots appeared to be keen to continue the co-operation. It was added that young people should be encouraged to extend their education, and the question arose –would the Polish Government support and continue the Scottish/Polish collaboration in the future ?
- Maureen Watt MSP asked if it was known how many Poles had returned to Poland? In reply SS said there were no statistics, but people were still coming from Poland.
- Claire Baker reminded the group that free movement was still in evidence and that there was constant movement, not always to Poland, but to other EU countries as well.
- RF raised the issue of student fees and the completion of their degree courses currently 4 years , post Brexit . He mentioned the new Lithuanian Centre in Aberdeen and the proposal to establish Polish Studies in Polish at the Lithuanian Centre ; he also proposed establishment of Post-Graduate studies in Polish there .
- BK and SS agreed that in areas of Edinburgh and the Borders, Poles were going back, similar comments also expressed from the Fife migrants forum.
- MZ stated that Polish immigrant numbers were rising, but at present there was no clarity on the number of applications for “Settled Status” .
- DJ referred to the “Citizens’ Rights Project “who travel all over Scotland to encourage Poles to vote and to apply for settled status .They also target large companies who employ many Polish Nationals.
- OW asked were there any plans to invite representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Poland to speak to the CPG group?

- John Mason MSP wanted to know what more he can do to support Polish constituents. SS for the Consulate replied that they will help address some of the issues with the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- BK suggested a link up with parents of Saturday School pupils in an effort to clarify some of the issues.
- OW offered the help of the Polish Professionals Forum.

There were no written reports from the sub groups .

- A verbal report followed from KS in connection with the Belvedere Forum scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> March 2020 in London. In 2021 the Belvedere Forum will be held in Poland.
- The issue of a possible clash of CPG/Belvedere dates has been resolved , thanks to CB's intervention to move the CPG to 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020.
- KS referred to a recent meeting with Frank Strang, ( Depute Director European Relations ) on the matter of bilateral relationships. It was suggested that there is an input from Scotland into the Belvedere Forum. KS proposed the CPG to invite and host the Belvedere in 2022.
- RF suggested it would be a good opportunity to showcase Scotland's position at Belvedere ,as at present it is very London –centric .
- IT agreed to speak to the Ministry re hosting Belvedere in Edinburgh in 2022.
- KS spoke of future plans to develop the Alumni network of Edinburgh and Jagiellonian universities following the re-signing of the Krakow/Edinburgh agreement and encourage young Poles and Scots to share transferable skills. It would be useful to set up digital hubs with the involvement of Scottish /Polish business fora –aimed at showcasing Scotland.
- It was mentioned that an attempt to move the Belvedere Forum would require discussions with Chatham House ; CB and JM agreed it would be advisable to write to Fiona Hyslop and Ben Macpherson to sound out their views on this .

Update on 11 Drummond Place (Old SPK House)- Internal renovations have started and are due for completion next year. Possible events may be hosted there .

### **Sub Group Updates :**

Culture group Update :

- Ken Johnson spoke about Wishaw House ,and Hamilton Palace in Lanarkshire , as being of interest to the CPG .He also mentioned further plans for the Chopin tour and further celebrations of Polish /Scottish Culture links

Education Group update :

- Education Group Update BK spoke for the group ,stating there would be a meeting the next day and the group would be welcoming new members ,a new report will be prepared for the next CPG

## Mental Health Links Update

- Olivia Willis raised the issue of many Poles not taking up the current NHS screening options for a variety of health issues EG Diabetic eye problems, Cervical screening.
- BK agreed that many Poles tend to bypass NHS screening programs and prefer to go to Poland for treatment .
- CS said the Sikorski Club in Glasgow aim to contact various health organisations to encourage Poles to take up offers of screening
- CB suggested we write to the Health Minister
- OW stated that Poles tend to return to Poland for urgent treatment, as there is no language barrier, she suggested there maybe suspicion of GPs here and many get medicines from Poland, treat themselves and eventually seek consultant advice in Scotland

## Business Links Update

- OW listed the many services provided by the Business group –among them professional coaching, CV writing and support, The business group have won a number of awards and have involvement with a Swedish Choir, A Hindu community group ,Scottish/Polish Roadshow and many discussions..

## **Claire Baker appealed to all CPG members -asking everyone to contact their MSPs to come and join the Cross Party Group**

- KS said the Facebook group for CPG was a closed platform, CB said she would follow up
- JM said she didn't think more sub-groups were needed as there was already a reasonable geographic spread
- Fife Migrants suggested inviting business MSPs to the next meeting
- CB replied that no resources could be provided by Parliament, and the CPG on Poland was not supported
- Councillor Graczyk queried the response to Edinburgh Council withdrawing Heritage Language classes , which had been running for a number of years
- CB said she would forward the letter

**The date of the next Cross Party Group on Poland meeting is to be Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at 1.00 pm in Committee Room 3**

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

