



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION MARKS SCOTLAND WEEK

It is Scotland Week in Brussels from Monday 11 October. A five-day programme organised by the new Scotland House and formally opened by the First Minister, Donald Dewar and the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, will place Scotland in the limelight in Europe's capital.

The European Commission in Scotland and Liz Holt, its newly appointed Head, will look forward to next week's series of showpiece Scottish events in Brussels by holding a reception on 7 October in the Signet Library, Edinburgh. Many of the growing numbers of people in Scotland whose lives and work connect with Europe will be represented there.

Liz Holt will emphasise the importance of Scotland's place in Europe. **"A distinctive Scottish voice in Brussels – for government, Parliament, business, the social economy, young people, women, the whole fabric of Scottish life - is the ideal complement to a strong and persuasive European voice here in Scotland,"** she says. **"All that the new Scotland stands for – greater democracy, national and local; people's rights and responsibilities; delivering a model of effective and responsive governance – are issues of compelling relevance in our modern Europe. New technologies are shrinking distances, making us see that the periphery is far closer than we think. The message of Scotland Week in Europe is that Scotland is not at the edge but at the centre."**

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ARTICLE FOR SCOTSMAN ON SCOTLAND WEEK BY DONALD DEWAR

Today is the last day of Scotland Week in Brussels. After a day looking at how Scotland should relate to Europe in culture, tourism and the arts, the week will be rounded off with a damn good hooley. The organisers and the sponsors would hate to hear me describing their meticulously planned Ceilidh as that but I think I am being realistic. I hope they enjoy it. They deserve to, both because of their efforts this last week and because the hard work actually starts here. Scotland in Europe is moving from concept to reality and that is going to demand a lot of effort. But it will be worth it, for Scotland, for the UK and, in a modest way, for Europe.

We have got off to a good start. I was in Brussels myself for the early part of the week, both for the formal opening of Scotland House with Robin Cook and for a programme of meetings, symposia and discussions. It was invigorating and demanding.

The support we have received from the UK Government as we start to operate as a devolved government in Europe has been superb. Foreign policy is not our bag and I make no pretensions otherwise. But we are immensely strengthened in our EU activities by the fact that we can rely on the support and expertise of the Foreign Office. And I hope we can begin to offer them some recompense for that, as we work with the UK Government to further our common aims. Devolution will give the UK another level of engagement and another string to its bow. We can operate not only at member state level but also at the regional level. Tony Blair has made it crystal clear that the UK is not going to stand on the sidelines in Europe but is going to play a full role as a trusted and dynamic partner. That is a vision I share absolutely and we in the Scottish Executive and, I hope, in the Scottish Parliament, want to play our full part in achieving that.

But it should come as no surprise that I take diametrically opposite view of Europe to that recently put forward by Lady Thatcher. What are we actually doing about it?

The short answer is that we are getting engaged. Earlier this week, I was able to pay my first calls on the newly installed European Commission. The appetite for renewal

and for a fresh approach was tangible. The new Commissioners I met were impressive: David Byrne, responsible for consumer protection, with his lawyer's grasp of detail; and Michel Barnier, responsible for regional policy and structural funds, who will clearly bring a fresh approach, laced with great charm, to a complex area of EU policy.

I also renewed contact with some more familiar faces. Commissioner Fischler, who wears lightly his long experience of EU agriculture issues and, of course, Commissioner Kinnock, now entrusted by Romano Prodi with one of the most challenging portfolios in the Commission – reform. Indeed, Neil Kinnock's lucid exposition of his plans for the reform of the Commission, and his emphasis on the practicalities of making it happen, was one of the highlights of the week.

So they were some of the formalities. But Brussels has a way of doing business that is not easily encapsulated in formal events like meetings and seminars. Valuable though all my formal discussions were, I also learned a very great deal from simply engaging with other European politicians over cups of coffee and 'in the margins' (a very Brussels phrase) of the events we were involved in. There is nothing at all sinister or secretive about that. The great thing about Brussels is that information and ideas flow backwards and forwards in a very open way. The gatherings I attended were in no way exclusive. If someone has something interesting to say, they can come along and share their thoughts with others and those others can listen, exchange business cards and follow up the contact, or just drift on to another conversation. The trick for Scotland House will be to get the best both from the formal mechanisms that exist and from the informal ebb and flow of ideas.

But why bother with all this in the first place? Why not stick to our knitting - are relations with the EU not reserved anyway? If I may stretch the metaphor to breaking point, the question misunderstands the nature of knitting and the wool you need for it in the modern Europe. The fact is that the EU is one of the most important policy drivers in a very wide range of Scottish Executive business and in almost every important issue that comes before the Scottish Parliament. So it is essential, to make our devolved government and democracy work, that we understand what is happening

in Europe and are able both to advance Scottish interests and contribute to the larger endeavour that is the European Union.

The Scottish Council Foundation produced a report recently which introduced a new piece of academic jargon to our political discourse – ‘para-diplomacy’. They use it as a name for international activity by sub-national bodies within a framework that is managed and overseen at nation state level. In that sense, the term could be used for what we are now doing as devolved Scotland. We are not running our own foreign policy – we don’t need to because we are part of the UK and are served by one of the world’s best and most experienced diplomatic services. But we are building up relations with other regions and member states in the EU because it makes sense for us to do so in seeking to discharge our responsibilities as a devolved government.

There is scope for confusion here and the new jargon term is, in one respect, unhelpful and, possibly, outdated. ‘Diplomacy’, for most people, means dealing with matters foreign. But Europe is not ‘foreign’. We are part of Europe and Europe is part of us. So it is both natural and desirable that we should seek dialogue with those in other parts of Europe from whom we can learn and with whom we share so many interests and problems.

This is nothing new, in itself. The Scottish Office has developed contacts across Europe for years. What is new is the political entity of a devolved Scotland. When I meet the President of Flanders or the Ministerpresident of Wallonia, as I did when I was in Brussels, I do so as a counterpart. We are all regional politicians in Europe with our own democratic mandates. There gives us common interests. We can learn from each other. The same is true for, amongst others, the German and Austrian Lander and the regions and provinces of Spain and Italy.

I don’t think the term ‘para-diplomat’ is going to catch on. But the regional dimension to the EU is an important one and I am both excited and proud that Scotland is now able to take its place within it, as a substantial player in its own right.