

PARTICIPATION IN EXTERNAL BODIES: EUROPEAN BODIES

1. In previous Sessions, the Scottish Parliament has nominated members to two European bodies: the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Committee of the Regions.
2. This paper provides background information to help inform decisions on continuing participation in the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Committee of the Regions: UK Contact Group, which from a UK perspective is the body which has replaced the Committee of the Regions as a result of EU Exit.

Council of Europe

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is an entirely separate body from, and not part of, the European Union infrastructure. The Council of Europe was established after the second world war and prior to the establishment of the European Union.
4. The Scottish Parliament is able to nominate one full member and an alternate member. In previous sessions, the full member has tended to come from the party of Government and the alternate member from the main opposition party. Members of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee may be an appropriate fit. Sessions of the Congress are six-monthly and generally held in Strasbourg. There are three committees - the Monitoring Committee, the Current Affairs Committee and the Governance Committee. Each committee meets up to twice a year for a day at a time, at various locations.
5. The Scottish Parliament's last full member stepped down during Session 5 and the Parliament has not nominated a member since then. The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has considered continued participation in the Congress and agreed that the Parliament should continue to participate in it. The Committee's discussion indicated that Members believed that there should be more transparency about agendas and outcomes of Congress meetings, with a reporting process back to the Parliament being put in place.

Indicative time commitment

Full member: Two plenaries of four days in Strasbourg, and two committees of 1-2 days.

Alternate: This is a substitute role, so substituting for the Full member.

Committee of the Regions: UK Contact Group

6. When the UK was a member of the European Union, the Scottish Parliament was able to nominate representatives to the Committee of the Regions (CoR).

The CoR is an institution of the European Union (established in the EU Treaties) which represents the interests of regional and local authorities in the European Union and addresses opinions on their behalf to the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

7. When the UK left the European Union, it lost the right to nominate members to the Committee of the Regions.
8. At its meeting on 11 February 2020, the CoR Bureau agreed to [establish the UK Contact Group](#) with the aim of maintaining:

‘relations with representatives of UK local government and devolved administrations to ensure that political dialogue with these representatives continues.’

9. Recognising the desire to maintain institutional links at regional level, the UK Contact Group is intended to maintain lines of communication between local and regional authorities in the European Union and the UK's cities, regions and devolved administrations. According to the Committee of the Regions:

“The Contact Group will meet up to three times a year to discuss issues linked to trade, the movement of goods, persons and services, and methods of continuing cross-border cooperation.

It is a unilateral body comprising 12 full members from the CoR, plus an observer from the CoR's newly formed Green group. The UK Contact Group will invite representatives of UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies to its meeting, based on the agenda of each particular meeting. The Contact Group may also take up invitations from UK local governments, devolved parliaments and assemblies to host meetings in the UK.”

10. The [agreed objectives and role of the new group](#) will be to:

- act as a forum for continuing dialogue and political partnership between EU and UK devolved legislatures and local and regional governments/authorities and exchange know-how, in particular on cross-border issues;
- provide the opportunity to discuss problems or opportunities arising from the withdrawal regarding the relationship between these institutions both within the EU and the UK;
- give these institutions a means of discussing EU legislation and possible changes where the legislation might impact even after the UK's departure from the EU.

The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has considered whether the Scottish Parliament should participate in the Contact Group. It concluded that participation would be beneficial to the Parliament.

Participation in the Contact Group would help support the Parliament's core post-EU scrutiny function, for example, by supporting scrutiny of the operation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement where it relates to devolved policy areas.

Conclusion

11. The Bureau is asked to

- a. nominate a full member and alternate member to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- b. nominate a full member and substitute member to the Committee of the Regions: UK Contact Group.

International Relations Office

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