

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SUBMISSION TO THE ALL WALES CONVENTION</b> <b>By the European Commission Office in Wales, 15 May 2009.</b></p>
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Further to a request by the Convention to submit written evidence regarding the relationship between Wales and the European Union, and prior to the public discussion between the EC Office and the Convention on 10 June 2009, the EC Office in Wales would like to provide the following statement.

"The European Commission Office in Wales was established in Cardiff in 1976 as an information office of the European Commission. Over time the role and responsibilities of this office have evolved and today the EC Office is the political representation of the European Commission in Wales, operating in the fields of public affairs, public diplomacy, political contacts, press & media activity, and outreach to the general public. As such the EC Office is the voice of the European Commission in Wales, but also its eyes and ears.

The EC Office in Wales forms part of the EC Representation in the United Kingdom, with Offices in London, Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff, and is one of 35 representation offices of the European Commission within the 27 Member States of the European Union. Administratively, the EC Office in Wales is part of the EC's Directorate-General for Communications, which currently functions under the responsibility of European Commissioner M. Wallstrom. All staff at the EC Office are EC employees.

It should be clear that the EC Office in Wales has as its main responsibility the representation of EC and EU interests in Wales, and has no role whatsoever in representing Welsh interests towards the EU institutions. However, the EC Office does try to facilitate and mediate in contacts between Welsh authorities and the EU institutions, while the task of representing Welsh interests in the EU is covered by the various representatives in Brussels of the Welsh Assembly Government, the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the Wales Higher Education in Brussels office, as well as by the members from Wales of the European Parliament, EU Economic and Social Committee, and the EU Committee of Regions.

The presence of the EC Office in Wales precedes devolution and as such the EC Office has always worked together with a large variety of authorities, politicians, businesses, educational institutions, charities and civil society organizations in Wales. Many of these contacts over the past decades have moved on to become prominent players in the age of devolution, such as for instance the Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM, who used to be the Head of the EC Office in Wales during 1980-1987. However, since the advent of devolution over the past 10 years the EC Office has started to work more and more with the National Assembly for Wales, and the Welsh Assembly Government, which have become its main contacts and partners in Wales. The EC Office regularly participates in the debates of the European and External Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, but also works very closely with the EU Affairs Department of the First Minister's Office, as well as with the Wales European Funding Office (WEFO).

The EC Office in Wales does not bear any responsibility for the management or implementation of EU funding programmes in Wales, however, on a frequent basis does refer Welsh organizations and representatives to the right sources where such funding can be obtained, such as WEFO (EU structural funds such as the ERDF and ESF), or to the relevant Directorates-General of the European Commission in Brussels, responsible for the

management of various other EU funding programmes (such as the FP-7, LIFE, education, culture, volunteer and citizenship programmes). With respect to the communication aspects of EU funding in Wales the EC Office does have a role and it tries to work together with WEFO regarding ERDF and ESF funded programmes, as well as with other Welsh stakeholders (local government, universities, NGOs) in respect of programmes centrally-managed from Brussels. In all cases, communicating the EU through funding programmes, or trying to raise awareness and understanding of the EU in general, are major challenges for the EC Office in Wales and are part of its continuous efforts to foster more understanding and greater ownership of the EU project among the people and authorities of Wales.

In many of its public contacts in Wales the EC Office often needs to clarify what the relationship between Wales and the EU is, an element of modern Wales that is often not fully understood. As such, from the perspective of the European Commission, Wales is part of the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom is a Member State of the European Union. Therefore, we deal with the UK Government as the sovereign Member State government, and based on UK constitutional structures we deal with the Welsh Assembly Government as part of the UK Government. A similar view applies to the relationships with the UK Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. The European Commission has no views regarding the constitutional structures, or developments, in EU Member States. However, it does have views on the importance of fundamental values contained in the EU treaties, such as democracy, respect of human rights, rule of law and the functioning of a market-based economy.

With the development of devolution during the past 10 years, various policy areas covered by EU legislation, coordination or discussion, have come to fall under the remit of the National Assembly for Wales. Matters covered today by the National Assembly, such as agriculture, the environment, social & employment affairs, education or economic development, all have important EU-related aspects. In certain areas the Welsh Assembly Government is responsible, as a devolved branch of UK government, for the transposition and implementation of EU legislation and policies. This direct responsibility for the implementation of EU legislation often gives Wales both the opportunity to put its own mark on the way that EU measures will affect daily life in Wales, as well as a degree of control over the management and execution of EU policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy. As Welsh and European constitutional development both continue to evolve, the scope for further Welsh involvement in EU policies and areas continues to grow, subject to the constitutional developments in the United Kingdom itself."

The EC Office in Wales is available for any other questions or issues that the Convention may wish to raise.

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