

INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW: 1 JULY-31 DECEMBER 2018

Executive summary

1. The International Strategy agreed by the SPCB in January 2017 stated that the International Relations Office (IRO) would produce a twice-yearly overview of core international work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. This paper covers the period 1 July-31 December 2018.

Issues and options

2. The IRO is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy. While it facilitates most inward and outward international visits, it is not involved in every visit to or from the Parliament e.g. those undertaken by committees as part of an inquiry or by MSPs on cross party groups. This paper therefore does not reflect all the Parliament's international activity, only that supported by the IRO.
3. The current International Strategy built on the experiences and practices applied by the Parliament in developing its international relations. Its central focus remains, i.e. linking to the Strategic Plan as well as highlighting work with other parliaments and through organisations with which the Parliament works.
4. The continued link to the priorities of the Strategic Plan has allowed the IRO to better plan outward activity, which in turn has led to a more efficient linking to resources. In short, the Parliament can more easily identify what it wants to do, why, and when. Outward activities instigated by the Parliament continue to focus on how we can embed parliamentary reform to have a stronger Parliament engaging with the people of Scotland, one of the key objectives within the new Strategic Plan. In addition, the case for an outward visit is supported by the opportunity to discuss with other legislatures policy issues which are of topical relevance to Scottish Parliament committees as well as other corporate priorities (which might cover matters of interest to the SPCB itself).

Countries/parliaments/organisations

5. At Annex A is an infographic showing inward and outward visits in the period of this report, while Annexes B and C provide a visual breakdown for inwards. Some narrative on specific work is set out below.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch

6. Scotland Branch members undertook the following CPA supported activities (outward visit reports are available on the IRO webpage):

- Presiding Officer chaired the 2018 Annual General Meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Scotland Branch
- CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee member, Stuart McMillan MSP, attended the CPA International Executive Committee meeting in London
- Maurice Corry MSP attended a meeting in London with the Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP, Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, to discuss the 'Male Champion' initiative and other matters. He also met CPA officials to discuss wider CWP work
- The Parliament's Business Continuity Manager, in collaboration with colleagues from Canadian and Australian parliaments, submitted an article on business continuity to the *Parliamentarian* quarterly journal

British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)

7. The Scottish Parliament has, along with the other devolved parliaments and assemblies, five 'Full' Members and four 'Associate' Members on BIPA. As in all other Sessions, a Deputy Presiding Officer acts as leader of the delegation and its representative on the Steering Committee. In Session 5, Linda Fabiani MSP was chosen as delegation leader. The four other Full Members are: Willie Coffey MSP, John Scott MSP, Pauline McNeill MSP and Ross Greer MSP while the Associate Members are: Gordon MacDonald MSP, James Dornan MSP, Mark Griffin MSP and Maurice Golden MSP.
8. During the reporting period there was one plenary session in London. The Scottish Parliament also hosted a meeting of the BIPA Steering Committee which the Deputy Presiding Officer attended. Pauline McNeill MSP also took part in a meeting of Committee D (Environment & Social) in Belfast as part of its inquiry into the cross-jurisdictional implications of abortion policy in the BIPA jurisdictions.

Outward visits

9. The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani MSP) and Mary Fee MSP (as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee) participated in a conference organised by the Parliament of Catalonia on 'gender sensitive parliaments'.

Parliamentary strengthening

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

10. The Parliament's collaboration with the WFD continued. The longest involvement has been with the WFD's Western Balkans programme. Initially this focussed on financial oversight which has engaged MSPs and Parliament officials working with elected Members and officials from across the various legislatures. However, the most recent involvement for

the Parliament was to host representatives from civil society organisations across the Western Balkans to discuss how to engage with parliament and parliamentarians and influence change.

Arctic Circle

11. The Arctic Circle 'is the largest network of international dialogue and cooperation on the future of the Arctic. It is an open democratic platform with participation from governments, organizations, corporations, universities, think tanks, environmental associations, indigenous communities, concerned citizens, and others interested in the development of the Arctic and its consequences'.
12. The Presiding Officer has met the Chair of the Council, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (the former President of Iceland), on two occasions to discuss the scope for the Scottish Parliament to become involved with the work of the Circle and the opportunities which this might present, particularly in relation to policy work which committees are involved with.
13. At the annual Assembly in Reykjavik Gillian Martin MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee participated in Assembly and breakout sessions, including one hosted by the Scottish Government, on a range of issues around climate change, marine pollution, and biodiversity.
14. Consideration is being given to further participation at the next Assembly in October of committee MSPs. The IRO will shortly have discussions with clerks and SPICe to consider the value and benefit to particular committees of such participation and of the Parliament hosting a breakout session (which might showcase inquiry work of committees here).

Ongoing

15. The IRO is continuing to seek opportunities for the Parliament to collaborate with organisations involved in parliamentary strengthening work and will discuss these with the Presiding Officer and the SPCB as they arise.

Long term programming and relations

16. Previous updates have touched on the possibilities for the Parliament to develop longer term relationships with other legislatures. Such relationships provide an opportunity for this Parliament to exchange skills and expertise with other parliamentarians and officials, generate new ideas and approaches, and strengthen international links. They can also allow work to be planned longer in advance and to link that work more directly with the Parliament's core duties, for example, committee work programmes.

17. The work of the Scottish Parliament continues to draw interest from other legislatures across the world, which has led to informal discussions around the scope for bilateral relationships (both in general terms and on specific pieces of work). In line with the overarching aims and outcomes of the International Strategy, a key consideration for any bilateral work is to identify the benefits they would bring to enhancing the Parliament's reputation, creating opportunities to exchange skills and knowledge linked to the continuous professional development of Members and officials and, importantly, providing a forum for discussion on policy and procedural issues that are directly relevant to the Parliament and committees.
18. The SPCB has previously indicated that it is content for the IRO to give initial consideration to this, with any firm proposal to be brought to the SPCB for further consideration and agreement. This matter is a key focus for the IRO in this second half of this Session of the Parliament.

Future reporting

19. In the first activity report submitted to the SPCB (November 2017), it was highlighted that the IRO would look at new methods of publicising the Parliament's international activity. Since then, improvements to the 'International Activity' webpage have been made through photos, more narrative around inward visits, and infographics. The IRO launched its own dedicated Twitter account on 1 January 2019 which has proved very successful in not only showcasing more of the Parliament's international work but in allowing IRO to pick up information from other legislatures and international organisations which will be of interest to other offices in the Parliament e.g. research on diversity of committee witnesses, approaches to tackling sexual harassment, public petitioning processes.

Resource implications

20. There are no resource implications arising from this paper. All visits in this period were accommodated from within the IRO budget or from other sources e.g. the CPA, BIPA, WFD.

Publication scheme

21. This paper will be published in line with the SCPB's Publication Scheme.

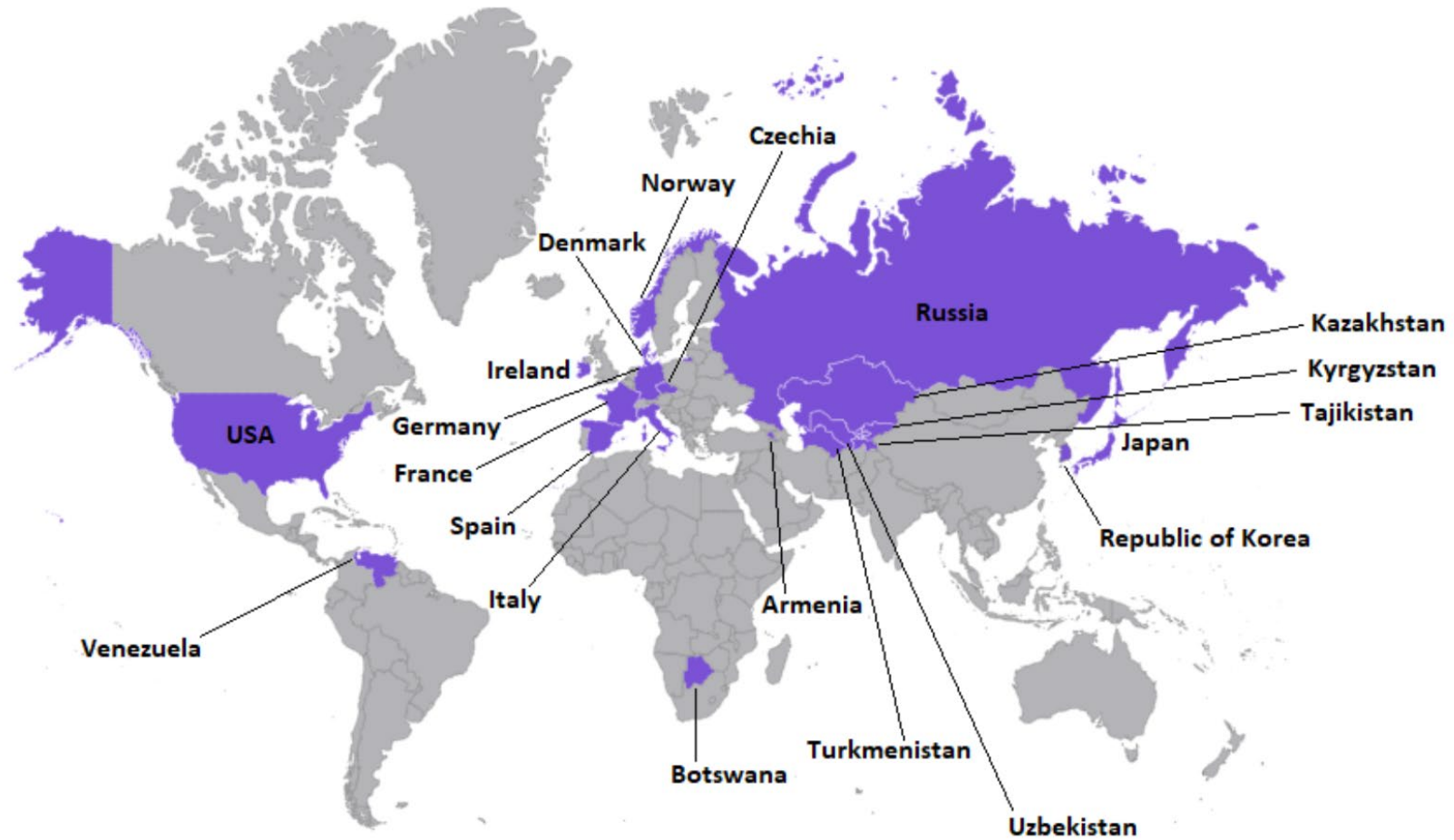
Decision

22. The SPCB is invited to note the activity undertaken across the second six months of 2018.

International Relations Office

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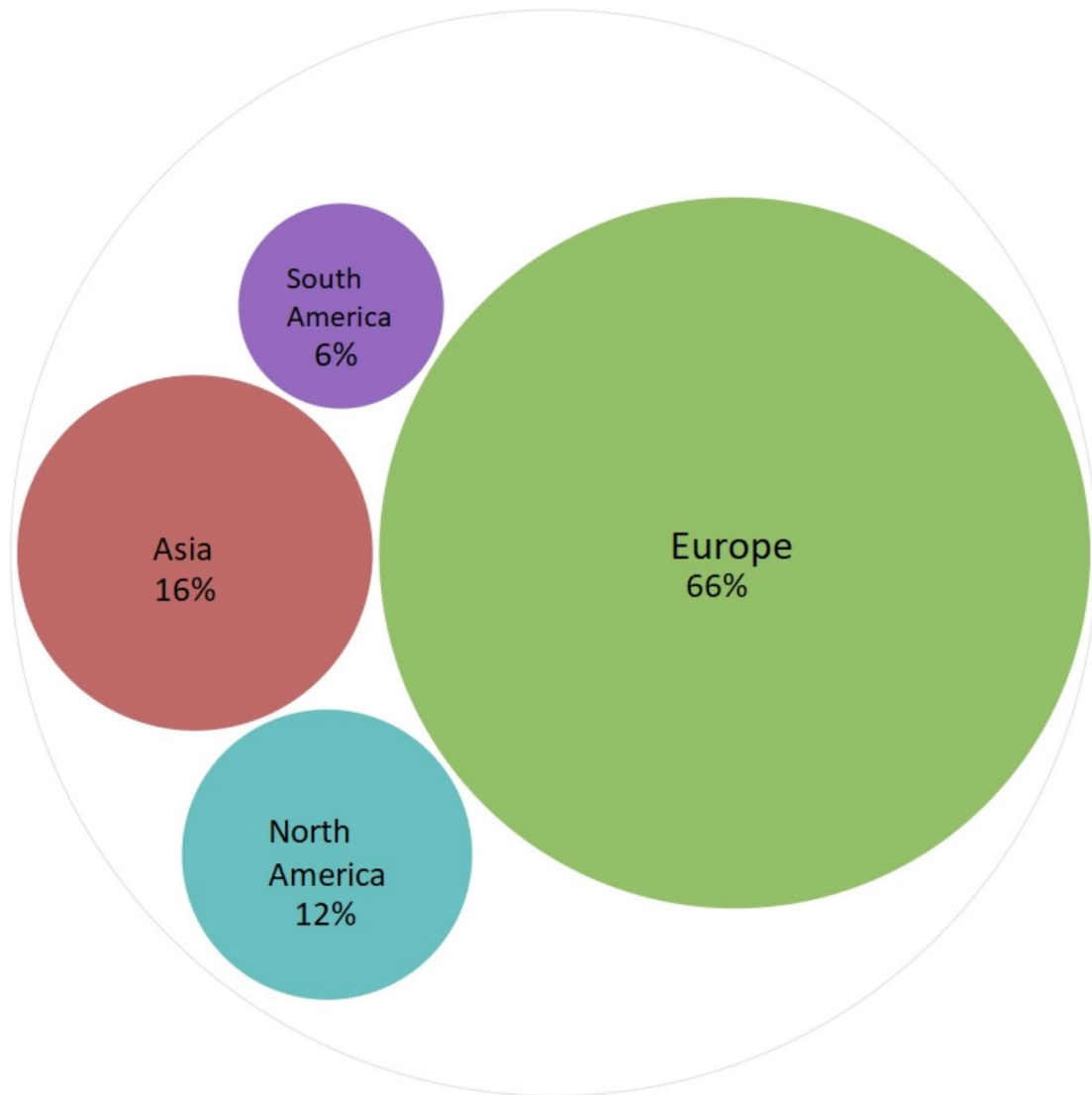
Inward visits to the Parliament 1 July-31 December 2018: Annex A



Outward visits by the Parliament 1 July-31 December 2018



Percentage of inward visits: Annex B



Breakdown of delegations by continent: Annex C

