

WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Executive summary

1. At the SPCB meeting on 23 November, in discussion about the Scottish Parliament's UK and International Strategy, Linda Fabiani MSP requested an information paper on the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). This paper provides an overview of Scottish Parliament engagement to date and of future planned activities.

Background on WFD

2. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) was established in 1992 to support the consolidation of democratic practices and institutions in developing democracies. WFD specialises in parliamentary strengthening and political party development and works at national, regional and local levels.

3. As well as being sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) the Foundation is accountable to the UK Parliament for its expenditure. It also contributes to the FCO's aim of making 'globalisation work for sustainable development in the UK and internationally by promoting democracy and the rule of law, good economic and environmental governance and security of long-term energy supply, measured by specific underlying targets', but remains independent of government in setting its priorities and programmes.

4. WFD's work focuses on strengthening parliaments and political parties in priority countries in Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. However they also work with the institutions that make up civil society. In all these fields they work at national, regional and local levels.

5. Within the UK Parliament, all UK political parties have established contact with, offer assistance to, and work with individual political parties or movements with which they have a political affinity. All three main UK political parties – the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats – have developed, with their WFD funding, comprehensive programmes of joint activity with their sister parties. Within Westminster, what are termed the "smaller parties" represented in Westminster (namely the DUP, Plaid Cymru, SNP, SDLP and the UUP) also participate in the Foundation's work in similar ways. In addition to this the UK political parties also work on a cross-party basis towards the aims of the WFD.

Scottish Parliament Engagement with WFD

6. Engagement with WFD is led by the UK and International Relations Office (UKIRO). The Scottish Parliament's 'UK and International Strategy' states that it is an intention of the Strategy to "look at developing a direct partnership during 2011-12 with a parliament(s) from Eastern Europe, looking to emerge as a European Union candidate country" with regard to Parliamentary strengthening activities. The WFD have indicated that there is strong interest from some countries in the Western Balkans region to work with the Scottish Parliament. The aim, outlined in the Strategy, is that the Scottish Parliament seeks to establish a sustainable relationship with one (or more) countries in the Western Balkans over the course of this Parliamentary session. Whilst not expressed in the Strategy, the countries of Macedonia and Montenegro have subsequently been identified as two potential countries in the region where fruitful co-operation could be developed.

7. Members will be aware that a delegation from Macedonia visited the Scottish Parliament in December 2011. The visit included a courtesy call with the Presiding Officer, meetings with the Convenor and Members of the Public Audit Committee, Chief Executive, Head of Chamber Desk and Head of Broadcasting. Feedback from the Macedonian delegation has been very positive and a range of areas for further co-operation and discussion were outlined by the delegation. These included: the provision of professional support to the work of MSPs (and how similar support could be provided to Macedonian members), the development and improvement of the work of Parliamentary Committees, the operation of the professional Parliamentary service generally, and the work of the Parliamentary broadcasting unit.

8. Currently, negotiations are underway with a delegation from Montenegro. The likelihood is that this visit will take place on 23 February with the delegation consisting of 7 Parliamentarians, from a range of Montenegrin political parties, and 3 officials. The primary focus of the visit is likely to be on the work of the Finance and Public Audit Committees.

9. In addition, discussions have been on-going between UKIRO and WFD officials regarding potential co-operation between the Scottish Parliament and WFD in the Western Balkans. WFD are currently developing a position paper with regard to areas of co-operation in the Western Balkans. From discussions, it is our understanding that the WFD paper is likely to focus on two main areas of activity, namely 'human rights and the rule of law' and 'investment reform'. Once WFD have agreed this paper, this will form the basis for further discussion on the scope for developing a sustainable relationship with a country (or countries) in the Western Balkans. It is expected that the WFD position paper will be agreed, and form the basis of further discussions, during February.

Resource Implications

10. There are no resource implications associated with this paper.

Dependencies

11. The development of relationships in the Western Balkans is dependent upon co-operation with WFD. To date, negotiations have been constructive and positive and there is no reason to suggest this will change. WFD are aware of the policy intent contained in the UK and International Strategy.

Governance issues

12. There are no governance issues associated with this paper.

Publication Scheme

13. This paper can be published in line with the SPCB publication scheme.

Next steps

14. Discussions between UKIRO and WFD are on-going on developing partnerships with suitable countries in the Western Balkans.

Decision

15. This paper is for information and no decisions are required.

UK AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICE

21 March 2012