

23.07.04

6 Deputy T.A. Coles of the Minister for External Relations regarding agreements signed with France (OQ.135/2023)

Further to comments by the chief officer for External Relations during a Public Accounts Committee public hearing that several agreements had recently been signed with France, will the Assistant Minister provide details of these agreements and their benefits to Islanders?

Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Assistant Minister for External Relations - rapporteur):

In 2023, the following have been signed with partners in France: a memorandum of understanding with the region of Brittany; a renewal of the memorandum of understanding with the Department of Ille-et-Vilaine; and a renewal of the memorandum of understanding with the University of Caen. These are all at the regional level, but have been signed with the overall context of the important Jersey French bilateral relationship, which is a priority for this Government. They strengthen our regional links with France and provide a framework for closer co-operation in areas, including education, culture, art, heritage and sport. Such links are vital for promoting people-to-people links, which help our young people develop mutual understanding and provide opportunities to learn from one another.

3.6.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Will the Assistant Minister confirm whether information on these agreements were going to be passed on to Assembly Members?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

My recollection is that they are generally made public. They are not just Jersey partnerships. In the case of the first one, that is a partnership, as I said, with the region of Brittany, including Jersey, States of Guernsey and associated signatories of the States of Alderney and the Chief Pleas. Same with the second one, with the Département of Ille-et-Vilaine, that is Jersey and Guernsey, States of Alderney, and again Chief Pleas. The one with the University of Caen is between the University of Caen and Jersey. I will, if they have not been put into the public domain, make inquiries.

3.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The first question is to ask: between which departments were all of these? He said between the University of Caen and Jersey, but University of Caen is an institution and Jersey is an Island. Can he give examples of which departments all of these have been made by?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

As the Deputy will be aware from my listing of the signed agreements, it is not the same in all cases. The 2 with the department and the region are at the Government level. They are signed by either the Chief Minister, if she is present, or the Minister for External Relations. The third one is between the University of Caen and the Department of Education. They are agreements which give rise to obligations to departments across Government.

3.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do have a supplementary. Deputy Coles asked about when States Members would find out about these agreements and the answer seems to be when they are made public, because they are public agreements, so there is no pre-warning. Does the Assistant Minister think that at least the

committee of the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie should be made aware in advance of what workloads are coming through External Relations in times of these bilateral agreements, simply so that we have the knowledge when we are travelling, for example this week, so we know what has been happening?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I am sure the Minister would be more than happy to brief the Assembly in the way that the Deputy has requested.

3.6.4 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister not agree that there is great benefit from publicising these agreements to a wider audience? While we have seen the odd snippet in the *Evening Post*, that seems to be as far as it has gone. Would he agree that we could do better at publicising these events?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

One can always do better with communication, as experience teaches us. I do believe that the Minister and the department do seek to publicise them. There is publicity around the agreements themselves. There is publicity at the signing summit. If more publicity can be given, I am sure that the Minister would be absolutely in support of that.

3.6.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Assistant Minister explain to the Assembly how these agreements translate into actions on the ground that reduce the red tape between Jersey and our French cousins in Normandy or distant cousins in Brittany? There is clearly a great appetite on both sides for people to improve their links and improve the flexibility of their travel. How are those agreements achieving that?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

The reality is, of course, these agreements are around person-to-person links and building stronger relationships. It is in the building of stronger relationships that the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture is seeking to enhance trade links with our French partners. It is on building relationships that the Minister for Home Affairs has been able to deliver the changes to the day trip documentation requirements. These really are a framework for building those relationships, upon which tangible actions and benefits can be delivered. The University of Caen and the Department for Education were able to negotiate preferential rates for Jersey students to study at the University of Caen. Various schools have done school-to-school trips. It is in the relationship that we then see the other benefits.

3.6.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Assistant Minister agree that the Parishes play an important part in this improving of relations, particularly with Normandy, although there is one errant Parish that is twinned with St. Clement? Would he agree with me that the job of the Maison de Normandie has been enormously helpful, particularly in the recent Twinning Games that took place in Grouville?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

For my part, I always consider that the Parish-to-Parish relationships are at the bedrock of Jersey's relationship with our French neighbours. It is upon that which we build all of the other relationships and opportunities. I agree with everything the Constable has said, although I perhaps would not be quite so derogatory around the implications of the twinning with the Parish of St. Clement.

3.6.7 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Given that there seems to be a frequency with which the Economic and International Affairs Panel seeks disclosure of these sorts of agreements, as well as memorandum of understanding, would the Assistant Minister support reviewing these, bearing in mind the Government's desire to improve transparency, the impact of such agreements and memorandum of understanding on the community? Would the Assistant Minister support there being a reference bank that is public for such agreements and memorandum of understanding that would be published on the Government's website?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I can see no impediment to taking such action.

3.6.8 Deputy S.G. Luce:

I would like to say I wrote to the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture and Minister for External Relations 3 weeks ago to say how much French I had heard spoken in St. Helier and how good it was, and that the talks that the Assistant Minister has been talking about have really come into fruition. Can I ask the Assistant Minister to keep the pressure on when it comes to opening of a border inspection post in Grouville and ask him if that work is continuing?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

It is continuing. It is one of the top priorities of the Minister.

3.6.9 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Would the Assistant Minister please provide assurances regarding due diligence and scrutiny of these agreements so that they are firmly of benefit for Islanders?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

They are without a doubt a benefit to Islanders in all the ways that I have explained and a myriad of others. As the chair of the Scrutiny Panel responsible for scrutinising External Relations, I have no doubt at all that that panel will continue to do its good work and scrutinise appropriately at the strategic but also at the detailed level of all such agreements. I know the Minister will look forward to continuing that work with the Scrutiny Panel.