

Team Europe

For Rhodri Morgan and Luc Van den Brande, teamwork is essential for regional success. **Matt Williams** reports



It is undoubtedly a very positive time for Wales as a region in Europe, according to Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan. Wales is due to receive £1.4 billion from the EU structural funds, a Welsh innovation centre won an award in the recent Regiostars competition for its cutting-edge research and development (R&D) within the opto-electronics industry, and Wales is due to host the famous Ryder Cup golf tournament in 2010. For Morgan, European funding is crucial for realising many of the key projects aimed at generating more money from existing skills and knowledge in Wales.

“Being able to follow on from Objective One funding, through what is now known

as convergence funding, is enormously important,” he says. “This was settled in the budget negotiations in Christmas 2005. This new funding programme started in January 2007, and so since then we’ve been organising all the projects, getting all the ducks in a row. One of the first projects to be funded comes under the knowledge exploitation fund (KEF), whereby we try to marry the enormous amount of research going on in our universities with the business sector. We try to make sure that we commercialise more and more of the inventions, innovations, new technologies and new products produced in the universities. To try and get them out into the marketplace.”

Morgan is optimistic about this partnership between the business world and that of academia. Business, he says, needs innovation, while the universities need more licensing income from commercialisation, in addition to funding from the KEF.

“This is the first programme being announced because there is a drive to maximise the knowledge economy, to stay one step ahead of China and India. In order to do that, you can’t compete on labour costs. You have to compete on the exploitation of clever technology.”

In February, the Committee of the Regions hosted the launch of the Ryder Cup in partnership with the Welsh





assembly. Morgan is positive about the role that the Committee of the Regions plays in securing important EU funds for Wales.

“It’s symbolic that the Committee of the Regions hosted the Ryder Cup launch. The new seven-year convergence programme is very important, and we have a very active representative from the Committee of the Regions. Regional development is not the same as regional politics, but we see the two things matched in our own very active role in the politics of regional development.”

Morgan says that there is more to this event than just the promotion of a golf tournament. “Although the Ryder Cup did not emerge from the EU institutions, the principle is the same. Sometimes, in order to compete against the USA, you have to combine the forces of Europe. In other words, there are things we do as ‘Europe’ which the individual member states can’t do alone. The people in the US were getting bored with the Ryder Cup because they used to win all the time, until 1979, since when Europe has been able to compete fifty-fifty, more or less. More recently, the Americans

have been getting beaten, as five out of the last six contests have been won by Europe. Now, of course, the US is taking it very seriously indeed, and the symbolism is that you can do better if you combine than if you simply do things alone. That Britain and Ireland became Europe is a very, very symbolic thing and unique in the world of sport.”

The president of the Committee of the Regions, Luc Van den Brande, is also attracted by the idea of ‘team Europe’.

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“When we talk about a team, we are talking about people who are working together. You have individuals performing their different functions within the team, playing the same game. For me, it is the same for the EU, to aim for partnership over all decision-making levels. Of course, there can be some competition, because competition is good, but competition in the framework of team building is much better.”

Van den Brande feels that this idea of more teamwork can influence the EU institutions, in particular the negotiation that takes place between member states.

“Multilevel governance is a kind of team spirit when it comes to decision-making. This is why I was delighted when the Welsh Assembly asked me to help present the launch of the Ryder Cup, because it is in the same spirit as our work in the Committee of the Regions. Of course, golf is not our core business, but at the same time, we can learn a lot from it; from the idea of a team, of working in partnership, learning to share decision-making and acknowledging and giving enough space to everybody.”

This decision-making must also include the idea of “fair play”, says Van den Brande, if agreements are going to be reached. “Firstly, for this to happen there must be respect. When it comes to sport, it is of course the general rule that we have to be fair. However, you can only be fair if you are able to give respect to the other people involved. Even respect to your counterparts. For that reason, I think that the basis of the EU is respect for each other’s autonomy, but at the same time respecting each other when it comes to achieving those things that we want to accomplish together.”

At the regional level, Van den Brande says that subsidiarity is the key if there is to be genuine teamwork within the EU. “I find that these days I am talking increasingly about subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is also a respect of sorts. You have vertical subsidiarity, which goes from the local level up to EU level. At the same time, there is also a horizontal aspect to subsidiarity. This involves trust being given to players not at the institutional level but in our societies. This is why, when I think of team-building, it is also a question of trust. You can’t play a good game without trust between the players. So we need to build on this relationship of trust, between the institutions but also at the level of our local and regional societies in the EU.” ★