



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation

to

Belgium and Greece

29 September – 7 October 2019

Commonwealth of Australia 2019

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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP
Member for Menzies (Victoria)
Liberal Party of Australia

Mr Damian Drum MP

Member for Nicholls (Victoria)
Liberal Party of Australia

Senator Pauline Hanson

Senator for Queensland
Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party

Senator James McGrath

Senator for Queensland
Liberal Party of Australia

Ms Joanne Ryan MP

Member for Lalor (Victoria)
Australian Labor Party

Officials:

Mr Tim Bryant
Delegation Secretary

Delegation to Belgium and Greece

Between 29 September and 7 October 2019, it was my pleasure to lead an Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Belgium and Greece.

The full Delegation was as follows:

Delegation Leader, The Hon Kevin Andrews MP, Member for Menzies

The Hon Damian Drum MP, Member for Nicholls

Senator Pauline Hanson, Senator for Queensland

Senator the Hon James McGrath, Senator for Queensland (Senator McGrath had to leave the Delegation on Wednesday 2 October for personal reasons)

Ms Joanne Ryan MP, Member for Lalor

The Delegation was supported by Mr Tim Bryant (Delegation Secretary).

The key objective of the Delegation's program was to participate in the 40th Australia – European Union Inter-Parliamentary Meeting with the Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand which is formally responsible for the European Parliament's inter-parliamentary engagement with Australia.

In addition, the Delegation's visit was an important opportunity to reinforce Australia's commitment to secure a mutually beneficial Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement as well as establish relations with the European Parliament following May 2019 elections.

The Delegation's visit to Greece represented an important opportunity to establish strong inter-parliamentary relations with the new Hellenic Parliament following recent July 2019 elections.

Brussels

Monday 30 September

The Delegation's program commenced with a series of commemorative activities. First, the Delegation visited the World War 1 battlefields, specifically Ieper and Passchendaele. Ieper occupied a strategic position during the First World War because it stood in the path of Germany's planned sweep across the rest of Belgium. Five major battles occurred around it during the war, one of which was the 1917 Battle of Passchendaele where, in only 100 days, almost 500,000 men were killed.

The Delegation visited the Memorial Museum of Passchendaele 1917 and was provided with a tour of the museum by the Director, Mr Stephen Vandenbussche.

Following this, the Delegation visited the nearby Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and Memorial to the Missing. This is the largest cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world, for any war. It is the resting place of more than 11,900 servicemen of the British Empire. The Memorial commemorates nearly 35,000 servicemen who died in Ieper Salient whose graves are not known. The Delegation was guided through the cemetery by the Chair of the Memorial Museum of Passchendaele 1917, Lieutenant Commander, Mr Freddy Declerck OAM.

The Delegation laid a wreath from the Parliament and People of Australia at the Cross of Sacrifice in commemoration of those who lost their lives.

The Delegation also planted crosses of remembrance (coordinated by the Australian War Memorial) inscribed by students of St Patrick's College, Campbelltown, NSW, at the graves of members of the Australian Imperial Force.



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Prior to returning to Brussels, the Delegation visited Menin Gate, Ieper and lunched with members of the Last Post Association, the organisation that coordinates the daily playing of the Last Post in honour of those who died in the Ieper Salient in the First World War.



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NATO

The Delegation returned to Brussels to attend a meeting at NATO Headquarters. The Delegation received a briefing from Mr Patrick Turner, Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning. The Delegation took the opportunity to understand more clearly the various issues NATO and its members were dealing with. Chief among these were international relations between super powers, immigration and terrorism. Mr Turner emphasised that Australia was, in NATO's view, a top tier partner nation which was playing a key role in educating partners about the Indo-Pacific region.

Tuesday 1 October

European Parliament

Prior to the day's meetings with members and committees of the European Parliament, the Delegation received a briefing from the Australian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the EU and NATO, His Excellency, Mr Justin Brown PSM.

The pre-eminent issue that the Delegation would be required to deal with was the progress of the Australia-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The Delegation's visit came at an important stage in negotiations. Australia and the EU had launched FTA negotiations on 18 June 2018.

While there is high-level commitment on both sides to the FTA, there are still some elements around which agreement is still to be reached. For example, on agriculture, Australia is looking for an outcome that is balanced and equitable and that delivers a level playing field. As part of that issue, the Australian Government published the EU's list of product terms (or Geographical Indications) with a view to considering the impact on Australian regional communities and agricultural industries. In addition, the EU has been clear it expects all FTA partners to respect and effectively implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, to which Australia is committed.

Other issues covered by the briefing included the overall strength of Australia's bilateral relationship with the EU built, as it is, on a shared commitment to democratic values and support of the rules-based international order, and multilateral cooperation through a number of international bodies including the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund.

Meeting with European Parliament Vice-President, Ms Mairead McGuinness MEP

The Delegation was welcomed to the European Parliament by Vice-President, Ms Mairead McGuinness MEP.

The meeting was an opportunity for the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, as Delegation leader, and Ms McGuinness to emphasise the close bonds between Australia and the EU. Both speakers highlighted the importance of the rules-based global trading framework, especially in a trading world facing challenges resulting from US and China trading tensions.

Mr Andrews reiterated the importance of securing an overall beneficial FTA and specifically a commercially beneficial agreement on agriculture. Mr Andrews noted that while agriculture was important, it was only one of a range of aspects which also included goods and services more broadly. These sentiments were reciprocated by Ms McGuinness who noted that climate change deliverables would also become a dimension of trade negotiations with the EU as a result of a commitment made by the EU at the recent United Nations Climate Action Summit.

The other members of the Delegation echoed these views, particularly around the fundamental importance of a rules-based global trading framework.

Exchange of views with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

This committee has responsibility for considering and approving the ratification of many EU international agreements. It is also the Parliament's voice on foreign policy, has responsibility for the EU-Australia Framework

Agreement, and was last addressed by then-Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in September 2016.

With approximately 150 members, it is a very large committee with a good deal of interest in the relationship with Australia. The proceedings were transcribed and live-streamed. Mr Andrews, from his position next to the Chair, made some opening remarks emphasising the closeness of relationships between Australia and the EU, especially as a result of post-war migration to Australia. Specifically on trade, Mr Andrews noted the importance of Australia-EU trade relations, which would remain so with or without the presence of Britain as part of the EU.



Mr Andrews emphasised that the Australia-EU FTA was at an important stage and that the focus was on reaching a comprehensive and ambitious agreement to secure commercially meaningful market access for Australian exports.

Following these opening remarks, Mr Andrews responded to a range of questions from committee members which included the status of trade talks with the United Kingdom, China's maritime expansion, Australia's views on counter-terrorism, and immigration policy.

In his responses, Mr Andrews emphasised the importance of an agreed global rules-based system and underlined the need for ongoing dialogue about a range of issues.

40th Australia-EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting with members of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand

The Delegation then participated in the 40th Australia-EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting with members of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand (DANZ).

DANZ is formally responsible for the European Parliament's inter-parliamentary engagement with Australia which occurs through annual meetings. The last meeting was in Sydney in October 2018 and the last Delegation to visit the European Parliament was led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Tony Smith MP in October 2017.

The meeting proceeded as per the agenda reproduced in Appendix 1.

The Chair of the EU Delegation, Ms Ulrike Muller MEP opened the meeting, warmly welcomed the Australian Delegation and emphasised the close and ongoing connections between the EU and Australia.



The Chairs of the Delegations

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Mr Andrews, as co-Chair, responded in kind and there was then an opportunity for other members of DANZ to contribute to the discussion, mainly around the strategic importance of relations with other countries in the region and trading relations.

The meeting received an update from one of the FTA negotiators who emphasised the multinational rules-based trading system, transparency and the need for like-minded partners. He also acknowledged that

negotiations around agricultural products would present some challenges. The subsequent discussion underlined the importance of the FTA discussions and the need to look beyond agricultural elements to consider the impact of technological changes and the protection of personal privacy.

The discussion turned to developments in the Indo-Pacific and the South Pacific. DANZ members highlighted the importance of sustainable development as part of FTA negotiations and linked this to the impact of climate change on nations in the Pacific. Mr Andrews noted the renewed focus by the Australian government on climate change and its impacts on its near neighbours. He also noted that developments in relation to China and the Indo-Pacific more broadly will have an impact on Europe and that Europe should partner with Australia in publicly supporting the importance of the international rules-based order.



Members of both Delegations following the 40th Australia-EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting
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Following a working lunch, the Delegation held two further meetings; the first with the European Vice President Pedro Silva Pereira MEP, a member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, to discuss further trade related matters; and the second with Ms Sandra Kalniete MEP, the Vice President of the European People's Party for External Relations, to discuss further issues linking Europe and Australia.

The day concluded with a dinner hosted by the Australian Ambassador for the Delegation and invited MEPs.

Wednesday 2 October

European Parliament

The Delegation returned to the European Parliament for one further appointment; this time an exchange of views with members of the European Parliament International Trade Committee.

This was an opportunity for the Delegation to reaffirm the values and aims underpinning the FTA negotiations, this time with MEPs with a keen interest in and single focus on international trade. Again, this was a live-streamed committee hearing with a very large membership. The Chair of the Committee, Mr Bernd Lange MEP, invited Mr Andrews to sit alongside him, and emphasised the strong and productive links between the EU and Australia. Mr Andrews echoed those sentiments and reiterated Australia's desire to advance the FTA and in so doing secure a good deal overall and, in particular, a commercially beneficial agreement on agriculture.

The meeting was then opened up to comments and questions from the floor. The matters canvassed included: multilateral agreements, the inclusion of sustainable development goals in trade negotiations, the importance of local regions in Europe and the need for protection of geographical indications (for example, the use of terms such as fetta), the oddity of the EU not yet having an FTA with Australia while more than 60 other nations have an FTA with the EU, and the challenge of Brexit.

In addition to reiterating the common values between the EU and Australia, Mr Andrews' response emphasised that the Australian government was seeking to grow Australia's services exports and investment in the EU through market access as well as regulatory cooperation.

This meeting concluded the Brussels leg of the Delegation's itinerary.

Athens

The Delegation arrived in Athens in the evening of Wednesday 2 October and received a briefing by the Chargé d'affaires, Mr Jon Philp, in preparation for the following day's program. The briefing provided an overview of the Greek parliamentary system (including recent elections and the issue of voting rights for Greeks abroad), the economic outlook for Greece, and Australia's trade and investment relationship with Greece, in particular any sensitivities for Greece arising from the EU-Australia FTA.

Thursday 3 October

Phaleron War Cemetery

Prior to a series of meetings at the Hellenic Parliament, the Delegation commenced the Athens leg of its itinerary by attending the Phaleron War Cemetery. More than 2000 Commonwealth servicemen of the Second World War are buried or commemorated at the cemetery.

Led by Mr Andrews, the Delegation commemorated the fallen by laying a wreath from the Parliament and People of Australia and observing one minute's silence. The Delegation then received a tour of the cemetery from the groundskeeper, Mr Manolis Tsoulos, and laid commemorative crosses, inscribed by Australian school children, at Australian graves.



The Delegation lays a wreath at Phaleron Cemetery

En route to the Hellenic Parliament, the Delegation stopped briefly to walk around the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre

which includes new facilities for the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera and which was completed in 2016. The near billion Australian dollar complex was donated to the Greek state in 2017 by the Foundation.

Hellenic Parliament

Standing Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs

The Delegation's first formal meeting was with the members of the Hellenic Parliament's Standing Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs. The Delegation was warmly welcomed by Third Vice Chair of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Athanasios Bouras. Mr Bouras described the composition of the Hellenic Parliament following the recent July elections. He emphasised the very close familial connections through the Greek diaspora in Australia, and further links forged through the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War, and the battle for Crete in the Second World War. Symbolic of those links, Australia and Greece signed a bilateral memorandum of understanding on the construction of a commemorative site on the Greek island of Lemnos, recognising the contribution of Australian nurses and doctors during the First World War. He finished with a wish that the two countries would strengthen these connections through investment.



The Delegation and members of the Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs

These sentiments were echoed by other committee members, many of whom emphasised their own personal connections with Australia through the Greek diaspora.

Mr Andrews responded by noting what a privilege it was to be at the home of democracy. He reiterated the importance of the strong people to people links and that post-war migration was central to Australia's subsequent development. He noted that a comprehensive and ambitious Australia-EU Free Trade Agreement would offer opportunities to expand trade links between Australia and Greece. Other Delegation members endorsed those views and commented on the significant Greek populations in their own electorates and the importance of those populations in enriching the cultural traditions of Australia.

A broader discussion followed focusing on improving the economic situation in Greece and the need for further investment and development to ensure the improvement continues. This was to become a major theme of subsequent meetings.

Committee members were also keen to discuss immigration related matters. Greece has the highest intake of refugees and other immigrants in the EU which places pressure on services and infrastructure. Mr Andrews described the suite of measures employed as part of Australia's migration program, emphasising Australia's long history of assisting refugees and people in humanitarian need. Australia consistently ranks in the top three resettlement countries in the world, with the United States and Canada.

This meeting was followed by a tour of the Old Royal Palace which houses the Hellenic Parliament.



Touring the Hellenic Parliament

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

The Delegation's next appointment was with the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. The Chair, Mr Stavros Kalogiannis, welcomed the Delegation on behalf of his fellow members.

Mr Kalogiannis's opening remarks built on those of Mr Bouras earlier in the day and drilled down further into the economic situation in contemporary Greece. He made the point that Greece's gross domestic product has been steadily increasing since early 2018 on the back of increased exports and private consumption. Taxes have been reduced on property and capital controls, imposed in response to the financial crisis, had been suspended freeing up investment opportunities. Plans for 2020 include further reductions in business and personal taxation, a reduction in social security contributions for salaried workers, and a focus on construction.

In responding, Mr Andrews emphasised the importance of the Australia-EU FTA negotiations, noting that Europe will be the third most important trading relationship for Australia after China and Japan.

Other members of the Delegation, drawing on their own experiences with constituents, endorsed Mr Andrews' comments about supporting Greece in rebuilding its economy and welcoming opportunities for further investment in Greece. As part of this discussion, Mr Andrews noted significant prospective Australian investments in hydrocarbon exploration and in airport infrastructure in Greece.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy and Openness

A working lunch, hosted by Mr Bouras, followed and then the Delegation moved across the road to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for its meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy and Openness, Mr Kostas Fragogiannis.

Mr Fragogiannis took particular care to emphasise that the Delegation had arrived at

a significant social and economic moment for Greece. He outlined that the new Government was taking important steps in encouraging investment and development to build on the economy's emerging strengths. The Government was focused on simplifying processes for development. To that end, the Government had established a rapid deployment unit which was able to travel from country to country pitching development opportunities. Mr Fragogiannis provided the example of Boston based pharmaceutical companies considering investment in Greece because of Greece's growing software development expertise.

The day concluded with a round table discussion with Greek and Australian business leaders and a dinner hosted by the Delegation.

Friday 4 October

Secretary General for Greeks Abroad

The Delegation's itinerary saw them return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their first appointment, that being a meeting with the Secretary General for Greeks Abroad, Professor John Chrysoulakis.

Professor Chrysoulakis spoke enthusiastically about the close connections between Greece and Australia built around the history of post-war migration and the current population of approximately 400,000 Greeks in Australia. While this population is concentrated in Melbourne, there are also significant communities in Sydney, Darwin and South Australia.

Mr Stelios Mantzaris (President of the Board of the Lemnos Friends of ANZAC Association), who was also part of the discussion, spoke of the strong connections between the island of Lemnos and Australia dating from the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.

A discussion about the location of commemorative activities associated with ANZAC Day confirmed they would remain in Athens.



The Delegation and Professor Chrysoulakis

Minister for Development and Investments

The Delegation's next meeting was with the Minister for Development and Investments, His Excellency Mr Adonis Georgiadis.

Mr Georgiadis echoed the comments of his colleague, Mr Fragogiannis, in endorsing his Government's focus on encouraging investment and development. He noted the economic difficulties of the previous ten years, and the big impact this had on some individuals who had pensions cut by more than 50 per cent. There was, however, a new sense of optimism in the country as evidenced by predicted growth rates, the increase in big infrastructure spending, the emergence of a more stable banking sector, and a newly elected government with a pro-business agenda. Particular areas that are likely to grow in the future included real estate, tourism and logistics given Greece's strategic position between Western Europe and the east. Mr Georgiadis also recognised the need to make this investment sustainable, in line with EU requirements and expectations.

Mr Georgiadis also talked of the importance of balancing investment across a range of strategic partners so that one single actor did

not have a disproportionate influence on the economy.

The Delegation, as it did in its earlier meetings, endorsed the further development of trading and investment links with Greece.

Following the conclusion of this meeting, the Delegation attended a working lunch hosted by the Chargé d'affaires, Mr Philp, with three prominent domestic analysts; Professor Loukas Tsoukalas (President of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy), Dr Platon Tinios (Assistant Professor of Statistics and Actuarial Science, University of Piraeus), and Dr Ilias Lekkos (Chief Economist, Assistant General Manager, Piraeus Bank).

Former Alternate Minister for Social Solidarity

The Delegation's final meeting of the day was with Ms Theano Fotiou, the former Alternate Minister of Social Solidarity in the previous (until July 2019) Syriza Government.

Ms Fotiou outlined the previous Government's approach to social protection in a time of economic austerity. Discussion between Ms Fotiou and the Delegation then moved to similar themes as those raised in earlier discussions.

This meeting concluded the Delegation's formal program.

Saturday 5 October

The Acropolis Monument and the Acropolis Museum

This was the final day of the Delegation's visit. Prior to departing for Australia, the Delegation took the opportunity to visit the Acropolis and accompanying museum with the Executive Officer of the Australian Archaeological Institute of Athens (affiliated with the University of Sydney), Dr Lita Tzortzopolou-Gregory.

The Delegation was very grateful to Dr Tzortzopolou-Gregory for giving up part of her weekend to provide her insights and expertise.

Following the tour, the Delegation returned to the hotel before flying out for Australia.

Acknowledgements

The Delegation would like to thank all those who contributed to making the program so successful.

The chief aim of the Delegation's visit was participation in the 40th Australia – EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting with members of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand. In addition, the program contributed significantly to the strengthening of relations between the Australian, European and Hellenic Parliaments and in this respect, went a significant way in meeting the objectives of the Delegation's visit.

In relation to the Brussels leg of itinerary, the Delegation would like to thank His Excellency, Mr Justin Brown PSM and his team, particularly Ms Laura Bellamy, at the Australian Embassy for supporting the Delegation through an intense program of meetings. Similarly, in Athens, the Chargé d'affaires, Mr Jon Philp, and his team, in particular Mr Andrea Biggi and Ms Lousi Kalfagian, provided an engaging program and close assistance throughout the Delegation's stay in Greece. Both teams worked tirelessly before, during and after the visit to ensure things went as smoothly as possible.

Thanks are also due to Ms Fiona Way from the International and Parliamentary Relations Office who arranged travel and other details for the Delegation.

Finally, I thank my fellow delegates for their thoughtful and enthusiastic participation in the Delegation's work.

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP

Delegation Leader

Appendix 1

Program of the Parliamentary Delegation to Belgium and Greece 29 September – 7 October 2019

Sunday 29 September

- Departure from Australia
- Arrive in Brussels

Brussels

Monday 30 September

- Visit to World War I battle fields including:
 - Passchendaele Memorial Museum
 - Wreath laying ceremony at Tyne Cot Cemetery
 - Menin Gate, Ieper
- NATO Headquarters

Tuesday 1 October

- Briefing by Australian Ambassador
- Visit European Parliament
 - Meeting with European Parliament Vice-President, Ms Mairead McGuinness, MEP
 - Exchange of views with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs
 - 40th Australia – EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting with members of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand

Agenda

1. Opening of meeting
 2. Adoption of the draft agenda
 3. Update on political and economic developments in the EU, following the European elections in May 2019, and in Australia following the Australian election of May 2019
 4. State of Australia-EU cooperation and ongoing trade negotiations
 5. Developments in the Indo-Pacific and particularly in the South Pacific
 6. Any other business
 7. Date and place of next meeting
- Lunch with Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand
 - Visit to Parliamentarium
 - Meeting with European Parliament Vice-President, Mr Pedro Silva Pereira, MEP

- Meeting with Ms Sandra Kalniete MEP, the Vice President of the European People's Party for External Relations
- Dinner with invited MEPs hosted by Australian Ambassador

Wednesday 2 October

- Return to European Parliament for exchange of views with members of the International Trade Committee
- Depart for Athens

Athens

- Briefing with Head of Mission on arrival

Thursday 3 October

- Wreath laying ceremony at Phaleron War Cemetery
- Visit Hellenic Parliament
 - Meeting with the Standing Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs
 - Tour of Parliament Building
 - Meeting with Standing Committee on Economic Affairs
 - Working lunch hosted by the Third Vice Chair of the Hellenic Parliament
 - Meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy and Openness
- Dinner and roundtable discussion with business representatives hosted by Delegation

Friday 4 October

- Meeting with the Secretary General for Greeks Abroad, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Meeting with the Minister of Development and Investments, Ministry of Development and Investments
- Lunch and roundtable discussion with prominent domestic commentators hosted by Head of Mission
- Meeting with shadow Deputy Minister for Social Solidarity

Saturday 5 October

- Tour of the Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum with the Executive Officer of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens, Dr Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory
- Depart for Australia

Sunday 6 October

- In transit

Monday 7 October

- Arrive Australia