25 July 2016

Dear Kezia,

Thank you for your letter, and your continued support of our efforts to protect Scotland’s relationship with the EU and our neighbours in Europe.

As you are aware, the Scottish Government is committed to delivering effective governance for Scotland, continuing to ensure a strong economy and fair work for all. Therefore I agree with the importance you place on jobs and the rights of workers in the context with our relationship with the EU. Securing these, and Scotland’s access to the Single Market, are amongst our key priorities and I set these out in my speech to the IPPR on 25 July. I am pleased to be able to count on your support through this.

I also wish to emphasise my agreement with the points you have raised on reaching out to those who voted to leave. While every part of Scotland voted to remain, a significant number in Scotland voted to leave. For some that vote may have come from a conviction that the EU is not perfect. However, it is clear that the UK-wide result also reflected a loss of confidence and trust in UK institutions. Many of those who voted to leave will have done so out of a feeling that they were being left behind. While those feelings may be less common in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, I am committed, more than ever, to working to strengthen trust and inclusivity across Scotland.

Since the referendum I have, like you, placed great importance on providing reassurance to those most affected -- the EU nationals who have chosen to make Scotland their home. I am happy to consider all possible options open to us as a Government to make clear to EU citizens that they are welcome here and that Scotland is their home. On 5 July I wrote to all EU nationals living in Scotland making clear that the contribution that they make to our economy, our society and our culture is valued.

In regards to the actions the Scottish Government has taken to protect Scotland’s interests at this time, I had a constructive meeting with the Prime Minister on 14 July at which I reiterated the points above. The Prime Minister committed to involving Scotland fully in the negotiations and not activating Article 50 until there is an agreed UK approach and negotiating objectives. The Prime Minister also committed to listening to the options that the
Scottish Government will table in due course for protecting Scotland's relationship with the EU.

I have since spoken to David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and impressed upon him the need for 'full involvement' to be a reality at Ministerial and official level.

At an Extraordinary Summit of the British-Irish Council on 22 July I met with representatives of all the Devolved Administrations; the UK Government; the Irish Government; and the Governments of the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey. We discussed the fact that the referendum presents challenges for all of us across these islands.

The Standing Council on Europe met for the first time on 14 July, and I am confident that this group will provide a source of counsel and expert guidance to the Scottish Government. I have included a minute of their meeting at Annex A.

You may wish to be aware that a discrete Directorate for External Affairs has been created within the Scottish Government to support this work and we are continuing to ensure that the best experience and expertise across the Scottish Government is available for this work.

I will, of course, continue to engage with Parliament as closely as possible. To that end I will be copying this letter to the leaders of the other parties in the Parliament, and to the Chair of the European and External Relations Committee. I will also be appearing before that Committee in the near future to provide an update.

I look forward to continuing our work together.

NICOLA STURGEON
Standing Council on Europe
First Meeting 14.07.2016

Present: Chair: Prof Anton Muscatelli, Principal and Vice Chancellor, University of Glasgow

Members in Attendance

Vasco Cal, Sir David Edward, David Frost, John Kay, Lord Kerr, Dame Mariot Leslie, David Martin, Alyn Smith, Grahame Smith, Professor Andrew Scott, Fabian Zuleeg.

Apologies: Dame Anne Glover, Charles Grant, Amanda McMillan, Frances Ruane, Anne Richards, Alan Miller

Opening Remarks from First Minister

- First Minister opened up the discussion by stating her objective:
  - To protect Scotland’s relationship with Europe
  - To look at all the options to achieve this aim.
- The purpose of the Council will be
  - Advice on priorities
  - Advice on UK Article 50 Negotiations
  - Analysis of particular options for delivery policy position

Meeting

- The meeting was opened with an introduction from the Chair setting out the high-level role for the Council and that the discussion would focus on three principal areas: policy priorities, process and engagement strategies. Members indicated their enthusiasm for these tasks.
- The flexible membership of the Council was also set out and the operating principles agreed.
- Discussion was broadly grouped under these themes with the following issues covered:
  - The overarching policy priority is set by the First Minister already and more detailed policy analysis will underpin the development of options to protect our relationship with the EU.
  - Scotland should have early conversations with the UK government to feed policy positions into the UK policy.
  - It is important for Scotland to maintain its presence in Brussels and continue to develop and invest in existing relationships and areas of policy collaboration.
  - The process of Article 50 is complex and likely to be made up of two principal strands of negotiation, one focussed on leaving the EU and a second, under a framework set by the first, on establishing a new relationship.
  - There is a need to look at what expertise SG and partners have at their disposal and to make best use of this.

The meeting was followed by a dinner hosted by Dr Alastair Allan, Minister for International Development and Europe.