Thank you for your letter of 30 June regarding the Article 50 withdrawal negotiations.

Since the General Election, I have been pressing the UK Government to agree a means by which the Scottish Government, and other devolved administrations, can play a direct and representative role in the negotiations. The Joint Ministerial Committee (EN) has not met since February, and I have been working closely with my counterpart in the Welsh Government, Mark Drakeford, to urge the UK Government to re-set the work of this forum and consider how the process can move forward.

I have also had two informal phone calls with David Davis, and met with him privately on 6 July to discuss the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which has now been published. Those private conversations are important mechanisms for intergovernmental engagement, and whilst I welcome and value that, I am keen that the JMC(EN) reconvene as a matter of urgency to ensure that there is an effective formal multilateral mechanism to oversee negotiations with the EU and that, as far as is possible, outcomes agreed by all four governments are secured from the negotiations.

The Scottish Government has, and will continue to take an open and transparent approach. With Scotland’s Place in Europe, Scotland was the first administration to publish proposals for remaining in the European Single Market and mitigate the worst damage of a hard Brexit. Our position remains that this is the best outcome for Scotland, other than EU membership.

I hope the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament can work together on these matters to do all we can to protect Scotland’s interests in Europe during the UK’s negotiations to leave the European Union.
The First Minister and I have made a commitment to keep the Parliament as fully informed as we can throughout our discussions, whilst respecting the sensitivity of negotiations and maintaining the confidence of our counterpart administrations.

I have also asked officials to ensure that the Committee is informed about any future Scottish Government publications on Brexit related matters.

MICHAEL RUSSELL