21 December 2017

Dear Joan,

I wrote to you on 1 December to give notice that there would be a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe (JMC (E)) on 6 December. I am now writing to report on the Scottish Government’s actions at that meeting.

Items on the agenda at this meeting were as follows:

1. Priorities for the December European Council
2. The European Pillar of Social Rights
3. Ongoing EU business during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU

I welcomed the new chair of the JMC(E), Lord Callanan, to the role and stated that I hoped the good working relationship established under Lady Anelay would continue. I expressed my thanks for the quality of the papers produced, but again stressed that in order to more fully consider the contents we would like to receive future papers further in advance.

With regards to the first item, Priorities for the December European Council, I stated that Scottish Government priorities are closely aligned with those of the EU, and this paper helped demonstrate the benefits of EU membership. I raised Scottish Government concerns regarding the risks of such benefits being lost as a consequence of Brexit, highlighting Dundee being ruled ineligible to bid to become European City of Culture as a vivid example of this.

I sought a view from the UK Government on the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and whether other Member States would allow third countries to participate in efforts to deepen defence cooperation across Europe.

In terms of migration, I reiterated that Scotland’s needs differ significantly from the rest of the UK, highlighting our Migration Advisory Committee submission that over the next 10 years it is estimated that 100% of Scotland’s population growth will come from migration.
On the second item, *The European Pillar of Social Rights*, I stated that Scotland is a leader in many of the areas covered by the European Pillar of Social Rights, highlighting in particular gender equality, fair work and the living wage.

I sought the UK Government’s views on the Social Scoreboard and whether this would be adhered to post-Brexit.

Regarding the final item on the agenda, *Ongoing EU business during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU*, I highlighted the point raised by the Lord Advocate that Scotland has a separate legal system from before the Act of Union. As one of the Presidency priority areas is justice it is important for the Scottish Government to be involved in shaping the agenda.

I emphasised that the Scottish Government is eager to support the Presidency’s focus on ‘Competitiveness’, which includes areas such as the Digital Single Market and cross border services, and to continue to benefit from these in the future. I highlighted our commitment to sustainability, with the Circular Economy as an area where Scotland has great ambitions.

Further commenting on the Bulgarian Presidency priorities, I enquired about subsidiarity principles on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) schemes and highlighted Scotland’s differing needs from the rest of the UK.

The next European Council will take place on 22-23 March 2018. The date for the next JMC(E) has been provisionally suggested as 12 March but this may be subject to change. I will write to you again once a date has been confirmed.

(ALASDAIR ALLAN)