



Huw Irranca-Davies MS
Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

SeneddLJC@senedd.wales

10 March 2022

Dear Chair,

I am writing in response to your letter of 15 February 2022, in relation to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

I welcome the Committee's support for our position that Welsh Ministers should be able to contribute on issues that fall within devolved competence as active participants of the Partnership Council. The Committee will be aware that a new UK-EU Relations Interministerial Group has been established and the UK Government attempted to arrange a first meeting in February. You will, however, have seen the Written Statement published by the Minister for Economy on the regrettable circumstances around that meeting.

The arrangements will need to improve fundamentally in future – to reflect a more respectful approach to working with the devolved governments as agreed in the Intergovernmental Relations Review – if this IMG is to function as intended. If this can be achieved, the main role of this IMG will be to provide a forum for the four governments to discuss issues relating to meetings of the Partnership Council (and the Joint Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement), and I expect that we will use this forum to press further for the full and active opportunity to participate in the Partnership Council. On your specific point about maintaining the four nation approach set out by Lord Frost, we expect the UK Government to abide by its commitments in this regard, notwithstanding the Ministerial changes that have taken place, and we have seen nothing to indicate that the UK Government plans to resile from these commitments.

In relation to your points about the Welsh Government's involvement in the Specialised Committees, and the means by which the Senedd is kept updated, the Welsh Government is committed to continuing to provide information proactively on its intergovernmental meetings in line with the Inter-institutional Relations Agreement. I am happy to explore how we can provide more information about our involvement in these TCA structures on a proportionate and pragmatic basis, while respecting the confidentiality of discussions where

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

appropriate and the fact that it is only the agreed and published minutes which can provide the formal record of what other parties involved in the meeting said and what decisions were reached. Welsh Government officials will discuss this with counterparts in the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the UK Government; and I suggest that officials then meet with your Committee Clerk to update on those discussions.

On the Domestic Advisory Group, the UK Government has told us that officials have been briefing FCDO Ministers on their new EU-related portfolios. They hope to be able to let those bodies that submitted Expressions of Interest (Eols) know the outcome of their applications in the near future. We do not know which bodies have submitted Eols, because we understand from the UK Government that a number of Eol submissions did not give permission for their information to be shared outside the UK Government. I will write to the Committee again once more information is available about the Domestic Advisory Group. Less progress has been made regarding the membership of the Civil Society Forum, partly because the EU still has internal processes to complete before membership can be decided.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD