

Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS

First Minister

15 February 2022

Dear Mark

### **UK-EU Agreements: The Trade and Cooperation Agreement**

Thank you for your response, dated 18 January, to my letter of 5 November 2021 in relation to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (the TCA). We considered the letter at our meeting of 24 January.

We share your disappointment that the UK Government has not responded to the Minister for Economy's request, made in June 2021, for the Welsh Ministers to contribute on issues that fall within devolved competence as active participants of the Partnership Council. We look forward to learning the outcome of your discussions with the Foreign Secretary and ask that the Committee be informed as soon as possible. We would also welcome confirmation on whether the four-nations arrangements for both the TCA and Withdrawal Arrangement, communicated by Lord Frost in May 2021, will continue under the Foreign Secretary, and whether the Welsh Government has requested the arrangements are reviewed to better reflect its requests.

We welcome your commitment to continue to publish written ministerial statements following meetings of the Partnership Council. In our first letter, we also asked how the Welsh Government intends to keep the Senedd informed of its involvement in these meetings and the issues that are discussed. In response, you referred the Committee to the European Commission's website for the minutes of meetings.

We are disappointed by this response. It should not be incumbent upon Members of the Senedd to search records on the European Commission's website to be able to scrutinise the Welsh Government's role in these bodies. Whilst accepting that reporting on each individual meeting may not be proportionate, we ask that you reconsider your response to us, and consider a proportionate but more transparent mechanism for informing the Senedd of Welsh Government attendance at these meetings, the issues discussed and the points made by the Welsh Government in representing Welsh interests. There will be many meetings of these committees that are of considerable importance and interest to stakeholders in Wales and this information should be made readily available or easily accessible to both stakeholders and Members of the Senedd.

We are aware that parliamentary colleagues across the UK share our concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding the operation of TCA governance structures. It would be helpful if all four UK governments could collectively consider this issue and how it might be addressed.

Finally, we welcome the engagement between UK Government and Welsh Government officials in relation to the role of Welsh representation at the Civil Society Forum and the Domestic Advisory Group established under the TCA. We would be grateful to receive confirmation of how many Expressions of Interest were received from Wales as a result of the exercise and when the Welsh Government expects the outcome of the Expressions of Interest process and meeting information to be published.

Yours sincerely,

*Huw Irranca-Davies*

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Chair