



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

6 October 2023

Dear Huw,

At my appearance before your committee (18 September) I agreed to write to confirm the Welsh Government's strategic forward approach to the European Union.

Since the UK exited the European Union at the start of 2020, our aim has been to maintain the Welsh Government's profile as a European country. From 2016 onwards, we repeatedly stated that Wales is, and will always be, a European country, inside or outside the EU. The Welsh Government believes it is both desirable and likely that the UK will develop a more productive form of Brexit and that, as we do so, the Welsh Government should be well-placed to maximise the advantages of an improving relationship in practical ways.

We committed in our Programme for Government to maintain our office in Brussels precisely for these purposes. During the 20 years before Brexit, the Welsh Government built up capital with the EU as an engaged participant. Since Brexit we have invested effort and energy into maintaining this capital. The Brussels Office helps us to maintain connections and keep up to date with EU developments in which we retain an interest.

To complement this work, we appointed Derek Vaughan to act as a representative, tasked with sustaining high level relationships in Brussels with a mandate from the Welsh Government. Derek has drawn on his experience and networks to maintain visibility for Wales with stakeholders including MEPs, the Commission and other decision-makers and opinion formers. We believe Derek's work, alongside our other officials, has been a real benefit for Welsh profile at a time when the overall UK image has, frankly, struggled for traction.

I have myself made it a priority to visit Brussels at least annually and I have encouraged other ministers to visit when useful opportunities arise. I was pleased to see the Minister for Economy addressing the Regional Policy committee of the European Parliament earlier this year. I am supportive of Members from all sides visiting Brussels and elsewhere in the

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Mark.Drakeford@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Mark.Drakeford@gov.wales

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.

course of their work; as a country, we must do all we can to send out positive signals about Wales' engagement with Europe.

Beyond Brussels, we work actively to develop and maintain partnerships across Europe. I visited Brittany, for example, during August both for bi-lateral purposes and to engage with the newly-established Celtic Forum of nations and regions. We participate in other multi-member regional networks such as the CPMR, the Vanguard Initiative (which Wales currently leads), and we have a high profile in the community of "Lesser Used Languages". We have active bi-lateral relationships with countries and regions including Ireland, Brittany, Basque Country, Flanders and others. In addition to Brussels, we have officials based in Dublin, Paris and Berlin working on trade and other issues alongside colleagues in the UK embassies. We encourage and receive significant inward visits to Wales from our European partners and friends on a very regular basis. We encourage traders to develop and maintain exports to Europe, and Wales remains firmly open to investors.

The UK Government's relationship with the EU went through a very negative and damaging period. More recently, the Windsor Framework and UK access to Horizon are modest steps in the right direction, though I must record my regret that innovators and researchers missed several years of access to Horizon through poor UK Government positioning.

I would like to see us go significantly further in a relationship with the EU. The Welsh Government would like, for example, to access the EU's ERASMUS programme; we were particularly disappointed at the UK Government's refusal to include this in their withdrawal agreement. Our hope is that ERASMUS and other programmes will become available to us in the years ahead; in the meantime, our TAIH programme facilitates exchanges in both directions for young people across Europe.

We also regret that the UK Government seems determined to abandon measures originating from the EU which protect our water and environment. The Welsh Government is determined, where we have powers, to main at least EU-levels of environmental protection for our land, water and air. We hope that a future UK Government will propose negotiations with the EU on a veterinary agreement to facilitate the movement of livestock and food across our external borders.

In summary, the Welsh Government is forging a positive relationship for Wales with Europe. We believe this represents investment in our future. We welcome the committee's support for this work and we urge all Members to contribute when opportunity arises to maintaining positive relations with Europe.

Yours sincerely,

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

MARK DRAKEFORD