

Scottish External Affairs Secretary responds to the Prime Minister on Europe

✘ The Prime Minister David Cameron made a speech about Europe and the referendum at Chatham House earlier today.

Mr Cameron began by saying: “Almost 3 years ago, I made a speech about Europe.

“I argued that the European Union needed to reform if it was to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

“I argued that Britain’s best future lay within a reformed European Union, if the necessary changes could be agreed.

“And I promised the British people that, if I was re-elected as Prime Minister, we would have an in-out referendum.....and the final say on whether our national and economic security is better protected by remaining in the European Union, or by leaving.

“That promise is now being honoured.”

He continued to explain the changes required if the UK remains a member: “The European Union needs to change.

“It needs to become more competitive to cope with the rise of economies like China and India.

“It needs to put relations between the countries inside the Euro and those outside it – like Britain – onto a stable, long-term basis.

“It needs greater democratic accountability to national parliaments.

“Above all, it needs, as I said at Bloomberg, to operate with the flexibility of a network, not the rigidity of a bloc.”

Commenting on the publication of the Prime Minister’s core demands on renegotiation of the UK’s European Union membership, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs Fiona Hyslop said:

“The Scottish Government believes that European Union membership is in the best interests of Scotland and the rest of the UK – and we will make the strongest case possible for a vote to remain in the EU.

“The danger is that the Prime Minister’s ‘asks’ risk pleasing no one – neither those across Europe with whom he has to negotiate, nor those in the UK for whom no renegotiation will be deemed good enough and for whom only a vote to leave Europe will be acceptable.

“The result of that is that Mr Cameron risks pushing Scotland and the rest of the UK closer than ever to the exit door of the EU.

“Having not been consulted on the details of the UK Government’s renegotiation we will now consider the potential implications of these proposals on individuals, communities, families, businesses and organisations across Scotland.

“While we are open to attempts to secure greater adherence to the principle of subsidiarity, any increase in the role of national parliaments must consider possible impacts on devolved parliaments. We have also yet to see the detail of proposals to increase competitiveness and to address the question of how non-Eurozone countries are represented in the EU.

“We recognise EU migration is critical to the development of Scotland’s economy, so we are completely opposed to any measures to restrict benefits purely on the basis of

nationality, particularly where people are working and contributing to the benefits system. We are also opposed to any proposals that could weaken human rights laws – any UK move to undermine existing EU and ECHR human rights protections will hurt people at home, in Scotland and across the whole of the UK, and diminish the UK's reputation overseas.

“Exit from the EU would pose a direct threat to jobs, investment and international influence – and that is why this Government will continue to make the positive case for membership.”

The Edinburgh Reporter met up with the External Affairs Minister yesterday in Dublin where she was also speaking about Europe: