

Brexit talks in London



The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, went to London earlier today to meet the Prime Minister Theresa May and the leaders of the other devolved nations, Carwyn Jones from Wales and Arlene Foster of Northern Ireland at a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Referendum.

We knew that Ms Sturgeon was up for an early flight as she started tweeting this morning pretty early. She had already written an article for [The Financial Times](#) in which she set out a picture of what a flexible Brexit might look like.

Last night she published a letter she had written to the Prime Minister ahead of the talks hoping for a positive outcome.

The letter read:

Dear Theresa

I am writing to express my strong support for Carwyn Jones' letter of 21 October, setting out his thoughts, in advance of Monday's plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee.

Carwyn Jones is right to highlight that, although the referendum results varied across the UK, with England and Wales voting to leave, whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain, we have a collective interest in seeing your commitment that the Devolved Administrations should be fully engaged in EU discussions and that you will not be triggering Article 50 until we have an agreed UK approach and objectives for negotiations, delivered in a full and meaningful fashion.

It will not be acceptable for the devolved administrations to simply be consulted on UK Government plans. We must have

meaningful input into the decision making structure and the formation of negotiating positions.

To ensure that is the case and given the timing you have now set out for Article 50 notification, I endorse in particular Carwyn's point that the UK Government needs to urgently produce a clearly mapped out work programme of involvement with the Devolved Administrations, supported by a rigorous timeline, to ensure progress keeps pace with the requirement to agree a UK position.

While there are some areas, such as continued UK participation in the single market, on which all 3 Devolved Administrations will agree, the UK position will also need to take account of the specific needs, responsibilities and priorities of each administration as part of the overall UK package. To ensure those are properly reflected and the stated position of all parts of the UK as a partnership of equals is respected, I also endorse the proposal that the proposed negotiating package should be subject to a vote in each of the four of the United Kingdom's parliaments and assemblies.

As you know following Scotland's unequivocal vote to remain in the EU, the Scottish Government has a democratic duty to protect all of Scotland's interests and we are considering all possible options to ensure Scotland's continuing relationship with, and place in, Europe. I welcomed your willingness in July to consider proposals for different arrangements for Scotland as part of this process and will set out those proposals in the coming weeks.

I believe there is an obligation on all of us to try to work out solutions that will allow the vote in each of our administrations to be respected.

I look forward to discussing with you and colleagues on Monday how this is to be achieved.

I am copying this letter to the First Minister of Wales and the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

NICOLA STURGEON



Commenting following the meeting the First Minister said: “This was a long overdue meeting but unfortunately it was, in large parts, hugely frustrating.

“I set out Scotland’s key interests in protecting our place in the single market, securing continued freedom of movement and ensuring social and employment rights are protected. However, despite a full and frank exchange of views around the table we know no more about the UK Government’s approach to the EU negotiations now than we did when we went into the meeting.

“Four months on from the referendum we finally have agreement on a sub-committee of the JMC for the devolved administrations and the UK Government to discuss the issues raised by Brexit, but there is a significant amount of work to do to make sure that the engagement we have is meaningful.

“As a first step we agreed that there must be a detailed work programme developed ahead of the first meeting of the sub-committee. Crucially we agreed that this must be integrated with the wider process so that the devolved administrations can influence key Cabinet Sub-Committee decisions. We also agreed that there will be a further meeting of heads of government in the New Year.

“The Scottish Government is fully committed to engaging with the UK Government and we will seek to use our influence to ensure that the UK does not pursue a hard Brexit. However it is clear from today’s discussions that we must also continue

to pursue alternative options, including bringing forward proposals to protect Scotland's place in the single market even if the rest of the UK leaves, and continuing to prepare for the option of a referendum on independence if that is what is necessary to prevent the UK taking Scotland over a hard Brexit cliff edge."

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

Prime Minister Theresa May today told the devolved administrations she would strike a bespoke Brexit deal that works for the whole of the UK.

Speaking at the first meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) for 2 years, the Prime Minister told leaders from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that how the UK leaves the EU should not be seen as a series of binary choices.

The Prime Minister also told the devolved administrations that she wanted their input in shaping the negotiations to leave the EU – and that the final agreement will make a success of Brexit for everyone in the Union.

Following a constructive meeting lasting 2 hours, a new cross-nations forum on Brexit talks will be set up, to be chaired by Brexit secretary David Davis.

It was agreed that by the time of its first meeting in November a work programme would be established for this Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations to integrate it with the wider process of exiting the EU.

The Prime Minister also said she wanted the JMC meetings to take place more regularly and would set up another session early next year.

The Prime Minister set out her commitment to the Union at the meeting, and said her vision for working with the devolved

governments was for a relationship built on principles of mutual understanding and consensus and co-operation.

Following the meeting, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Working together, the nations of the United Kingdom will make a success of leaving the European Union – and we will further strengthen our own unique and enduring union as we do so.

The great Union between us has been the cornerstone of our prosperity in the past – and it is absolutely vital to our success in the future.

The country is facing a negotiation of tremendous importance and it is imperative that the devolved administrations play their part in making it work.

The Prime Minister told Nicola Sturgeon, Carwyn Jones, Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness that how the UK leaves the EU should not be seen as a series of binary choices and will instead amount to a bespoke agreement for the UK.

She said:

We have important work to do for the UK in terms of negotiating a smooth exit from the EU and getting the best possible deal for the whole of the UK.

The UK has chosen to leave the EU and we're going to make a success of it.