



Ursula Von der Leyen
President
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

20 January 2021

Dear President

Firstly may I send you best wishes from Wales for 2021. In particular, I wish you and all your colleagues across the institutions success in your continuing efforts to respond to the challenges of the Covid pandemic.

My government, like all national and regional governments across Europe, continues to do its utmost to keep our citizens safe and to support their economic future. I know we share similar objectives in this and will co-operate wherever possible.

I am writing to set out a positive vision for a constructive engagement between Wales and the EU in the changed world that is now governed and shaped by the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA).

Wales has been an outward-looking, European nation since its formation over a thousand years ago. It always will be. Our economic, social and cultural histories are intertwined with Europe's and predate the creation of the modern United Kingdom by many centuries. Our distinctive identity is founded upon that history.

A year ago we launched our *International Strategy* to support and emphasise our engagement around the world.

Wales shares fundamental values with the EU covering human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. I strongly believe Wales needs a very close working relationship with our European neighbours in the EU. We intend to deepen and build on our established partnerships with Member States, in particular, our close ties to our near neighbours in Ireland. We will do similarly with European regions, notably Brittany, the Basque Country and Flanders, and develop our continuing and active

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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.

membership of networks such as the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions and the Vanguard Initiative on Smart Specialisation.

We would also like to retain, as far as is possible given the UK's withdrawal from the EU, our excellent relationships with the EU institutions. These have been nurtured over the 20-plus years of devolved government in Wales, and embedded as a result of the very significant benefits, which we have derived from the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The Welsh Government has shared policy goals with the EU on many issues such as sustainability, the environment and biodiversity, climate, innovation and regional development, equality, and social affairs, amongst others. We do not want our cooperation with the EU institutions on sharing expertise and experience to be constrained by the limitations of the TCA. In particular, we share the EU's ambition for the progressive development of social and environmental standards, and look forward to developing policies in these areas that will align with those of the EU.

Of course, we are relieved the EU and the UK Government were able to negotiate that Agreement, even if it is more limited than we would have wished as a result of the UK Government's choices. May I take this opportunity to thank you and all the EU negotiators for the tireless, diligent and thoughtful work throughout 2020 to help put this agreement in place.

We recognise that for the TCA to function successfully it needs to be properly administered in line with its relevant provision and we believe that we have a role to play with regard to helping the UK meet its obligations as the signatory to the TCA. In particular, given our responsibilities for Welsh ports, we are working with ports, transport operators and the Irish authorities to sustain the flow of goods as part of the important supply chain in both directions between Ireland and Wales. The TCA recognises the very large degree of regulatory autonomy which the devolved governments have within different policy areas. I want to assure you that the Welsh Government will work very constructively and positively with the UK Government, the EU and our partners and stakeholders in Wales to support the effective working of the TCA, reflecting our devolved policy responsibilities.

The development of our distinctive Welsh policies and legislation has been based on similar values, evidence and analysis that the EU uses. Our policy and regulatory framework will need to evolve over time, to respond to new challenges and new evidence, just as the EU's will. We very much hope to continue to engage with partners in the EU institutions and national and regional governments, to support the best policy choices in that evolution: to share experiences of both the development of policies and the analysis of their impacts.

Our policy distinctiveness in Wales covers some important areas that are at the forefront of the EU's agenda. On sustainability, Wales has had its own unique legislation since 2015 – the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act – to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being through improved and joined-up policy-making.

We have developed a distinctive approach to the management of our extensive natural resources, with policies to support rural communities through a more sustainable and climate-friendly approach to agriculture, and significant developments in innovative renewable energy. On cyber security, the visit of Commissioner King to Wales in 2017 underlined the potential for pan-European collaboration on this vital sector. We are pleased that our excellent higher education and research institutions from Wales will be able to continue to participate in Horizon Europe and are urgently investigating how we can continue close engagement with exchanges of students, learners and young people

following what we regard as the deeply regrettable decision by the UK Government not to participate in Erasmus Plus.

Wales is, of course, a bilingual nation with the two languages, Welsh and English, having equal status, which is part of our unique identity. In addition, our experiences of this bind us positively to the EU as a multilingual organisation that respects and supports linguistic diversity and recognises the fundamental importance of language in all aspects of its business.

We will retain a strong Welsh Government presence in our Brussels Office to work with all the EU institutions, in conjunction with the UK Mission to the EU. The European Parliament has established an EU-Wales Friendship Group that we will actively support. We expect to run a number of events at our premises in Brussels to support our engagement with the EU once Covid restrictions allow. Unfortunately, that will not be in time for our traditional national day celebrations for Saint David's Day this year on 1 March, though we shall be promoting Wales through online events that week.

Wales remains part of the UK and so is no longer formally part of the EU. Nevertheless, we are very keen proactively to engage with the EU to ensure that the TCA works for all our citizens, including the thousands of EU nationals who remain resident in Wales. We hope we can play a constructive role as a bridge between the EU and those in the UK who continue to be guided by the sound principles that have helped to found and to develop the EU's policy-making, as well as ours. Those principles will be a solid basis for the challenges that our small and proud nation faces. We know that we can best address them through constructive partnership with our many neighbours, big and small, near and far, across the islands in our own corner of Europe, and across the whole of Europe. We look forward to a very constructive and productive relationship with all of the EU institutions.

I am copying this letter to the Presidents of the European Parliament, the European Council, the Committee of the Regions, and the Economic and Social Committee, and to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs in the UK Government, the First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Best wishes

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

MARK DRAKEFORD