



# The European Union's Strategic Agenda for 2020-24: Scotland's Perspective



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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The Forth Bridges, near Edinburgh

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Cover image – Cliffs near the Tomb of the Eagles, South Ronaldsay, Orkney Islands

## Ministerial Foreword

This document sets out how Scotland sees the EU's priorities for the period ahead. It explains why these are of vital importance to Scotland and how Scotland can contribute to their delivery.



Image: Jane Barlow/PA

**In the first half of the last century, the nations of Europe were devastated by conflict unlike anything seen in human history. Today, those same nations which suffered so greatly are more united than ever. The European Union (EU) represents a continued pursuit of peace, democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and equality – values which we believe are integral to our future prosperity and wellbeing. These are values Scotland shares.**

The latest phase in the evolution of the EU is beginning to take shape. A new European Parliament has been elected and a new team of European Commissioners have taken office, ready for the task. The new President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has set out her vision for the period to 2024 and the European Council has agreed broad guidelines for the years ahead. All is to play for in deciding how the European Union will help steer its citizens through turbulent times.

At such pivotal moments in the EU's cycle, Scotland has routinely taken the opportunity to set out its views on the EU's priorities for the years that lie ahead.

These are of course not routine times. The global climate emergency and the rise of isolationist politics pose significant threats to the prosperity of Europe's people. And Scotland has been taken, against its will, out of the EU, the union which exemplifies the internationalist and consensus-based approach which is needed if we are to tackle these twin threats.

For nearly 50 years Scotland has been a fully integrated part of the EU; woven into the European economy and benefitting from the EU's social protections. Through our membership of the European Single market and Customs Union, Scotland has embraced EU membership and in turn contributed to the EU's success.

The people of Scotland have made very clear, on more than one occasion – including the 2019 UK general election – that they want to continue to be members of the EU. The Scottish Government has made clear that the people of Scotland should have the right to choose their own future. But the reality is that in the meantime Brexit will change radically how Scotland engages with the EU.

But Brexit will not change the EU's importance to Scotland nor our commitment to it. Geographically, Scotland may lie at the edge of Europe but we have always seen ourselves at its heart. Indeed in the Scottish Government's view the best future for Scotland would be as an independent nation and a member of the European Union in its own right.

This document is therefore founded on two undeniable facts: that the EU will continue to be of fundamental importance to Scotland and that Scotland will continue to be of importance to the EU, contributing to the EU's goals. It sets out the Scottish Government's aspirations for what the EU, in a new institutional cycle, does and stands for over the next five years.

Scotland will of course benefit as the EU pursues the agendas set out here. But Scotland will also continue to contribute, for example in addressing the global climate emergency, ready to play our part as a responsible, progressive, global and European citizen.



**Fiona Hyslop**

Cabinet Secretary for Culture,  
Tourism and External Affairs



# **Strategic Priorities for Scotland and the European Union 2020-24**

Whatever its constitutional future, Scotland will, like Europe, remain an outward facing constructive partner on the world stage. We will engage proactively and energetically with a wide range of issues on the EU's agenda. The specific issues will evolve as the years unfold.

In our engagement we will be driven by a set of clear and consistent priorities reflecting the values that Scotland and the European Union both share.

In identifying our priorities we will be guided in part by the agenda of the EU itself, in particular the European Council's [Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024](#) and the [vision](#) set out by Ursula von der Leyen for the new European Commission.

We will also be guided by our own ambitions and plans as set out in the Scottish Government's [Programme for Government](#) and Scotland's [National Performance Framework](#), itself firmly rooted in the international framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These are all closely aligned with the EU's agenda.



The River Clyde, Glasgow

**Against that background, our aspirations are that over the period 2020-24 Europe:**

- ✓ Embodies progressive, democratic values on the world stage;
- 🌿 Rises fully to the challenges presented by the global climate emergency;
- 🤝 Actively promotes the wellbeing of all of society; and
- Ⓜ Helps create smart economies which thrive by the intelligent and humane use of new technologies.

# 01 Embodies progressive, democratic values on the world stage



The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, Edinburgh



**The European Union is unashamedly built on a set of clear values. Originally conceived as a way to integrate the market for natural resources and contribute to ensuring peace, the EU stands for the rule of law, for democratic rights and for human dignity. None of those values can any longer be taken for granted in this 21st century world.**

As the horrors of the Second World War become a more distant memory, it is more important than ever to remember what the origins of the EU were. That includes championing and living by clear values, acting by its motto “united in diversity”. That has profound implications both for what the EU does and how it does it.

There is strength in this unity to be able to promote EU interests and values on the global stage to the benefit of Europeans. In a more uncertain world, it has become even more critical for the EU to be assertive and effective in defending EU interests challenging protectionism while standing up for the rules-based multilateral order, ensuring openness and fairness and promoting democracy and human rights.

It means standing up robustly for individuals’ freedoms and democratic processes. It means protecting individuals’ rights, including in the face of organised crime or attempts by multinational and other companies to misuse private and personal information. No country can do this effectively on its own.

Showing solidarity with our citizens and pursuing their interests in this way is entirely compatible with reaching out in friendship to others, whether near neighbours or from afar. Human rights and the need to defend dignity and freedoms do not apply only within the EU’s borders.

The EU must remain outward looking, resisting the temptation to turn inwards. It must offer hope to the world not only in the values it espouses in general, but in how it treats in practice individual people such as asylum seekers and others. We welcome the Commission’s commitment to

making a “fresh start” on migration and asylum by developing a new pact.

In championing democracy the EU has recognised the need to lead by example in how it conducts its business. That means, amongst other things, devolving decision making so that wherever possible choices are made closer to those who are affected. President von der Leyen has made clear that transparency and a stronger relationship with citizens is the foundation of civic trust and confidence and has underlined the importance of transparency and ethics to deliver in tangible ways on making the workings of the EU more meaningful to ordinary EU citizens.



## Scotland’s contribution:

Values are of critical importance to Scotland. The Scottish Government is explicitly committed in its National Performance Framework to a clear set of values. This commitment to values is perhaps the most significant thing we share with our European neighbours.

Over a number of generations, Scotland has gained a well-deserved reputation of being a welcoming, tolerant and inclusive country. We defend vigorously the rights of our citizens. We also welcome citizens from the EU and beyond: they bring a rich diversity to our communities and create a vibrant and dynamic country.

Here are some examples of how Scotland is currently contributing to defending Europe's democratic values and protecting individual freedoms:

- **Our legal tradition:** Scots law is a distinctive mixture of Common law and Civil law. This reflects a shared past and a continental basis for a legal system, as the majority of Member States operate a Civil system.

- Our justice system combines a rights-based perspective projecting our fundamental values of **humanitarianism, tolerance and inclusion**, increasing the richness of our culture and society.

- We are leading the way internationally by **lowering the voting age to 16** and allowing everyone who has a legal right to live here, including foreign nationals, to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

- We are putting **children and young people** at the centre of our policy-making, ensuring that government decisions take account of what matters for them working closely with a dedicated Children's Commissioner and Parliament.

- We have made the decision to incorporate the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** into Scots law, the only country in the UK to do so but following in the footsteps of others in Europe.

- Scotland's justice organisations participate actively in networks which allow direct engagement with European partners: for example the **European Judicial Networks** in criminal matters and in civil and commercial matters.

Here are some examples of how that contribution will continue into the future:

- We are committed to remaining an engaged and outward looking partner, invested in our **bilateral and multilateral relationships** with bodies such as the EU institutions, OECD and WTO.

- We will continue to make distinctive contributions in addressing global challenges, sharing our **knowledge, skills and technical expertise for global good**: through our international development work we will contribute to alleviating poverty and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals in our partner countries.

- We will also seek to provide **ethical leadership** and a **positive voice in the world** on global issues such as solidarity, tolerance, human rights and climate change in our global supply chains and with our trading partners.

## 02 Rises fully to the challenges presented by the global climate emergency



**We are already deep in a global climate emergency. A global challenge has no borders and requires global action. As the Commission President has made clear, the EU has a vital leadership role to increase global ambition, in particular in the run up to COP 26 in Glasgow.**

That means the EU prioritising measures that will ensure it is climate neutral no later than 2050, with the required increased ambition for its 2030 targets. It also means ensuring that funding mechanisms are in place to ensure a just transition to a climate neutral future and the deployment of climate neutral solutions across the European economy, from power generation and industrial processes, to transport, the built environment, agriculture and land-use.

As underlined by President von der Leyen in her presentation to the European Parliament Plenary, the European Green Deal is also at its heart a growth strategy. It is underpinned by a commitment to an industrial strategy that enables EU businesses big and small to innovate and to develop new technologies which reduce their carbon footprint while accessing sustainable new markets and creating jobs.

Linked to this goal, the protection of the wider environment must be an overarching priority. This includes the EU taking a leadership position, globally, in halting the alarming loss of species biodiversity (including in its contribution to setting ambitious targets for biodiversity at COP 15 in Kunming, China), setting a 'zero-pollution' target, tackling environmental crime and delivering on the circular economy.



Seilebost, Luskentyre Sands, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides

## **Scotland's contribution:**

We welcome the urgency with which the Commission has come forward with the new European Green Deal and the ambitious roadmap they have laid out. We also welcome the latest announcement on the Just Transition Fund. The EU's commitment to ensuring that new measures taken are up to the scale of the challenge is vital. The EU has the opportunity to show leadership by collectively taking the hard decisions on the common actions needed to get us to where we need to be: the world's first carbon neutral continent.

Scotland's reputation as a world leader on climate change is driven by our ambitious targets. We are redoubling our efforts, and we will end Scotland's contribution to global climate change by 2045. At the UN Climate Summit (COP 26) in Glasgow in 2020, Scotland will showcase its greater climate ambition and leadership, as well as support global efforts to transition to a net-zero world in a way that is fair and just.

Here are some examples of how Scotland is currently contributing to address the global climate emergency:

- Our landmark Climate Change Act is amongst the most ambitious legislative frameworks in the world, setting a target of **net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045**.

- We are committed to **reducing our net emissions by 75% by 2030** and will publish an action plan on how we will get there by April 2020.

- We have established a **Just Transition Commission** to provide practical independent advice on how to maximise the economic and social benefits of decarbonising Scotland, while managing the risks and challenges.

- We continue to invest in **renewable technology innovation**, currently generating over 75% of our electricity from renewable sources with the aim of achieving 100% by the end of 2020.

- Scotland has world-leading expertise in subsea engineering and the traditional sectors of the wider **blue economy**. This can accelerate innovation in alternative sustainable energy sources (e.g. hydrogen) and decarbonisation through carbon capture.

- We are committed to reducing emissions from our **transport** systems, both decarbonising our existing models of transport and changing the ways in which we travel.

- Scotland's **land** plays a critical role. Scotland's vast expanse of peatlands act as a vital carbon sink and by restoring degraded peatlands we will improve their ability to store CO<sub>2</sub>. We have ambitious targets for reforestation.

- Scotland is helping to drive forward the **global agenda for biodiversity** and will formally contribute to development of the post-2020 framework for biodiversity, which will be finalised at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP 15 in Kunming, China.

- Scotland has a **rich marine environment**, sharing its seas and resources with many European nations. Scotland is committed to their sustainable and responsible management, safeguarding a valuable food source and trade commodity – vital to the economies of many coastal and rural communities.

- We are creating a more **circular economy** where materials are kept in a high-value state of use for as long as possible – for example through the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme.

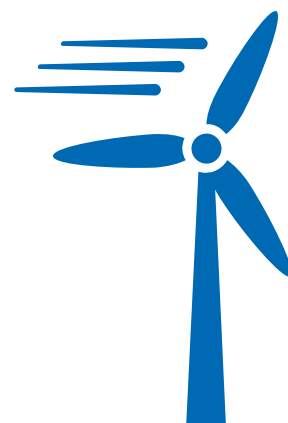
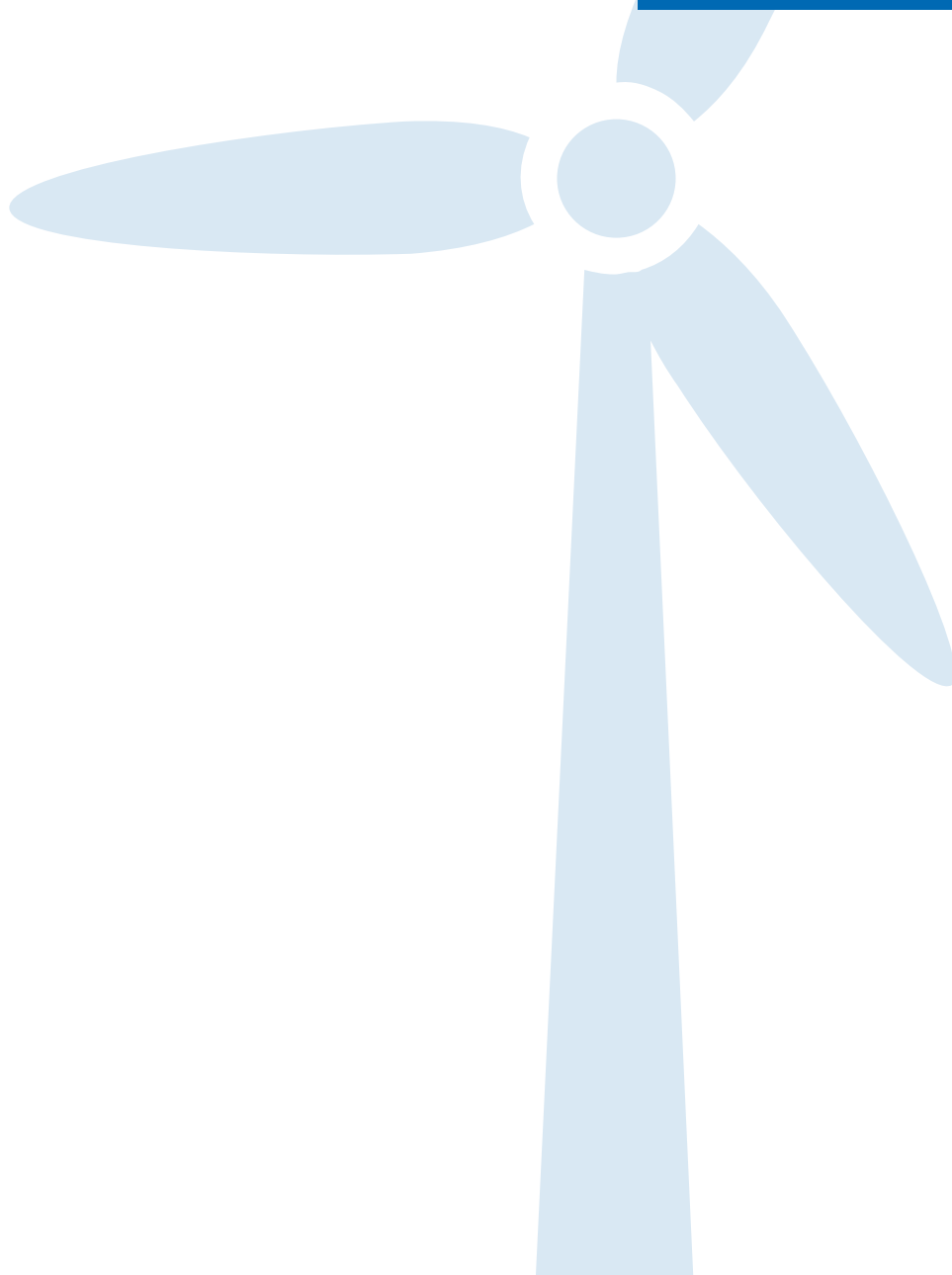
- We have taken action to reduce the use of plastic cotton buds and microbeads and will take further action by banning more problematic **single use plastic** items, such as cutlery, plates and food and drink containers, by 2021.

Here are some examples of how that contribution will continue into the future:

- Beginning in 2020, Scotland's **'Green New Deal'** – harnessing the **Scottish National Investment Bank**, a £3 billion Green Investment Portfolio and a Green Growth Accelerator – will create the right conditions to attract **green finance**, making a significant impact on emissions across sectors while guaranteeing new, high quality jobs.

- We will prioritise the role and growth of **the renewables sector**, sharing our world class expertise and skills with EU and other partners.

- In the built environment, we will scale up and accelerate existing work so that we **reduce emissions from heating our homes and buildings** to near-zero by 2045.



## 03 Actively promotes the wellbeing of all of society





**In global terms, most EU citizens are relatively privileged. And yet within EU societies levels of inequality are unacceptably high. Too many of our citizens face unnecessary and unfair barriers to fulfilling their ambitions. Young people, people in low pay or unemployed, women and older people all suffer disproportionately. In some cases, people in whole regions feel – and are – left behind and need to know that the EU is part of the solution for them.**

That means prioritising targeted measures such as those that tackle gender inequality and child poverty; developing new ways of delivering cohesion and upward convergence between regions and member states which have marked the European Union from its inception. More widely, we must promote lifelong learning with a particular emphasis on digital skills to allow EU citizens and SMEs to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by emerging technologies. This must be done in such a way that no one is left behind by the Industrial Revolution 4.0, with the benefits being shared throughout society while ensuring that the benefits of globalisation are felt by a wider range of Europeans as workers, consumers and citizens.

It also means accelerating the existing tentative moves toward economies based on promoting the wellbeing of all. Growth in which prosperity increases, coinciding with greater equity, is inclusive growth.

We will strongly support the European Commission's focus on empowerment through employment; investment in skills; fighting poverty; and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems.



## **Scotland's contribution:**

Promoting sustainable and inclusive growth is central to Scotland's economy. We are committed to improving economic growth in a way that reduces inequality, tackles blights of child poverty, alcohol and drug dependency, and improves quality of life and supports and benefits everyone in society.

In transitioning towards a low carbon economy we are also committed to ensure no-one gets left behind. Strengthening our rural communities and islands is also at the centre of what we do.

Here are some examples of how Scotland is currently contributing to a fairer and more inclusive future:

- Scotland faces a **population challenge** with rural depopulation and an ageing demographic. We have established a Ministerial Population Task Force looking to address these issues, and we are keen to share learning with other EU countries that face similar demography challenges.

- We are making **Scotland's workplaces fairer** through our work to reduce the disability employment gap, tackle the gender pay gap and tackle race inequality in employment while also investing in business led by women and other under-represented groups.

- We are working with partners to target sectors of high employment/low productivity, helping them to embed digital technologies and to provide workers with **opportunities to reskill and upskill** and supporting SMEs to innovate and internationalise.

- We also taking bold action to **tackle poverty and inequality** to make sure everyone in Scotland has equal opportunities. For this we have set ourselves ambitious targets to reduce child poverty.

- Our efforts to work with business to increase the number of people receiving at least the **Living Wage** – now over 80% of all workers – is helping to lift families out of poverty.

- Scotland is one of the most progressive countries in the EU for **LGBTI equality**. We are embedding LGBTI inclusive education within our school curriculum.

- Our **social security charter**, co-developed with people with relevant lived experience, is based on the principle that the promotion of dignity, fairness and prosperity for workers is a joint endeavour.

Here are some examples of how that contribution will continue into the future:

- We are committed to an economy in which everyone can contribute and benefit from growth. Our world leading National Performance Framework, incorporating the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, is helping us deliver in practice what is meant by a **wellbeing economy**. We were proud to host the Wellbeing Governments Group in 2019 with the EU Commission and others and will continue to take a leadership role.

- We shall continue to work to **tackle the causes of inequality faced by women** and to **end violence against women and girls** for good. We support EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.



## 04 **Creates smart economies which thrive by the intelligent and humane use of new technologies**



**The economies of EU countries are already unrecognisable from those of the 1950s. The pace of change, whether scientific, social or technological, is breathtaking. There is clearly a vital role for the EU in embracing and indeed driving that change, harnessing it well for the benefit of all our citizens.**

That means investing even more in crucial scientific endeavour and innovation, both financially and in fit for purpose mechanisms which allow our best minds to spark constructively off each other. Only by intentionally creating the conditions for cross fertilisation will the EU measure up this epoch-defining opportunity and challenge.

That is in part about encouraging continued intensive research collaboration. But it is also about prioritising continuing the flows of trade and of people from which all sides have benefitted in many ways over many generations and in ensuring an international infrastructure and regulatory framework that is fit for the future with common standards, gigabit networks, and secure clouds of both current and next generations. In embracing new technologies the EU has the potential to be a global standard setter – ensuring innovation and ethics go hand in hand and that EU citizens can feel confident that their interests are protected.

The pace of change will be such that policy and legal frameworks must be as fleet of foot as they can be, whether to frame new opportunities, such as AI, or to counter new threats.

Realising the huge potential of the digital economy must be a priority. Commission President von der Leyen rightly said that “Europe has all the scientists and all the industrial capabilities it needs to be competitive in the digital area. Innovation needs brains. But it also needs diversity and space to think. We have all that here in Europe.”



V&A Museum, Dundee

## Scotland's contribution:

Scotland has for many centuries been renowned as a place of learning and innovation, the cradle of both the innovative thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment and the industrial revolution. Even today Scotland is very proud of its many excellent places of learning, including its 4 universities in the world's top 200. EU nationals make a vital contribution to this success – 27% of research-only staff at our universities are non-UK EU citizens.

Here are some examples of how Scotland is currently contributing to creating a smarter EU economy:

- Scotland's research and innovation communities have been significantly active in partnering and collaborating under **Horizon 2020**.

- Scotland has played a key role in the **Vanguard Initiative** which promotes growth through smart specialisation, leading the way on for example spin out pilots (e.g. advanced manufacturing).

- We continue to take action to make Scotland world-renowned for **inventing, designing, developing and manufacturing** key products and technologies. We will particularly focus on industrial biotechnology, life sciences and the space sector.

- We want Scotland to become the first country in Europe to provide an end-to-end solution for **small satellite manufacture**, launch and innovation in satellite data analysis.

- Harnessing the potential of **digital technology** is key to Scotland's future prosperity. We aim to provide access to superfast broadband to every home and business in the country.

- We are also providing funding to help more people get the **digital skills** they need and for businesses to invest in new technologies such as cyber security and data analytics.

- Businesses that innovate are central to achieving our economic and social ambitions as they enable growth and create high quality jobs. We will support businesses by providing millions of pounds of funding annually for **research and development** and by continuing to make it easier for them to get the information, advice and support they need.

- The **bio-economy** is very important to the Scottish Government and its aspiration to drive forward a low-carbon future. The Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre in Glasgow aims to stimulate the growth of the Industrial Biotechnology sector in Scotland to £900m by 2025. Scotland's Industrial Biotechnology National Plan was refreshed in January 2019.

Here are some examples of how that contribution will continue into the future:

- Scotland remains committed to **international collaboration** as a driver for innovation and a healthy open economy to stimulate investment, trade and growth.

- Scotland is absolutely committed to the closest ongoing involvement in **Horizon Europe**.

- Scotland's world class universities will continue to welcome and actively seek out **academic partnerships** with others in the EU.



# Our Approach

**The Scottish Government is clear that our shared ambitions must live up to the scale of the challenges we face, and that our actions must live up to our ambitions. Whatever the years ahead may bring, Scotland will do everything it can to be an active, competent and constructive participant on EU matters.**

That will mean different things at different times and on different issues. It will involve:

- **proactive and constructive engagement with the EU institutions and other multilateral organisations.** We will engage with the European Commission and the other EU Institutions on the many areas set out in the Commission's work programme where we have expertise to share. We will remain engaged as constructive contributors to EU debates on issues of shared concern.

We will systematically enter into dialogue with each Presidency country on their plans for their term of office and on areas for potential collaboration.

We will maintain close links with members of the European Parliament, whether as members of a formal grouping or simply as allies on the key issues we all need to address.

Much of this activity will be driven by Scotland House Brussels – our window to the EU and wider European and international partners in Brussels, representing Scotland's economic and diplomatic interests at the EU level. We will also continue to build our relationships with other international bodies, working closely with the EU and other partners to tackle global challenges.

- **active bilateral collaboration with member states.**

This may take the form of country to country dialogue or of links with groups of like-minded countries. It will build on the step change in Scotland's activity in this area in recent years, with the creation of a network of offices in priority locations around the world and the conscious development of deeper bilateral links with e.g. Ireland.

Our new offices in Berlin, Dublin, Paris and London, in addition to Scotland House Brussels, will be central to these bilateral efforts.

Our involvement in less formal groupings will build on for example the warm reaction to our leadership on wellbeing economies and to our work with the Nordic and Baltic countries. The latter may well open the way for productive collaboration in future with what is being described informally as the new Hanseatic league.

- **robust and constructive engagement with the UK Government and the other devolved governments** to protect Scotland's interests and shape the UK Government's approach to influencing the EU and future international activity.

As long as the current constitutional arrangements persist, there are many areas where Scotland's interests need to be pursued by or through the UK Government.

We will be energetic in engaging with the UK Government on these issues, seeking to improve the structures in place so as to give all parts of the UK their voice and articulating vigorously and constructively Scotland's interests.



- **making Team Scotland a reality.**

Scotland may not be the biggest of nations, but we are fortunate in many ways, not least in the abilities of our people – wherever they have come from – and in the number of allies and like-minded friends we have around the world.

We will draw wisely on those riches in the years ahead.

That means encouraging people from all walks of life in Scotland to remain internationalist, open to people – and ideas – from elsewhere and alive to opportunities and challenges outside Scotland, especially in the EU.

It means bringing to bear the skills and expertise of others, such as our world class universities or our strong civic structures, in promoting the issues we hold dear.

And it means being ambitious in working closely with all those around the world – whether or not formally part of our growing network of Global Scots – who are keen to support the values and priorities Scotland stands for.

# Conclusion

The Scottish Government continues to be a keen supporter of the European Union.

We will remain an active and positive partner of the EU whatever the outcome of the EU/UK negotiations on the future relationship – and either under the current UK constitutional arrangements or as an independent country.

We will lend our support in particular to measures which embody progressive, democratic values; which address the challenges presented by the global climate emergency; which promote a fairer deal for all and which help create smarter economies, fit for the 21st century.

All of these challenges require collaborative, internationalist solutions and we look forward to working closely with all those who share these values and ambitions.



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