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SCOTLAND'S PLACE IN EUROPE

Following the referendum on 23 June in which a large majority of voters in Scotland voted to remain in the EU, the Scottish Government made it clear that it would explore all options for protecting Scotland's place in, and relationship with, Europe. This approach was reinforced by the strong mandate given by the Scottish Parliament on 28 June.

It is in this context that I am pleased to provide you with a copy of "Scotland's Place in Europe", a set of proposals designed to mitigate the risks for Scotland of being taken out of the EU. [www.gov.scot/scotlandineurope] This is the options paper I mentioned during the discussions at the British Irish Council Summit in Wales on 25th November when we last met.

These proposals have been developed in close consultation with stakeholders, here and abroad and has benefitted from the expert views of our Standing Council on Europe.

As the paper sets out, we consider that the UK as a whole should remain within the European Single Market, through membership of the European Economic Area and active cooperation in other areas. However, if the UK Government opts to leave, the paper goes on to set out detail on a differentiated approach which would allow Scotland to retain Single Market membership, as part of the UK.

The paper also sets out proposals for the fundamental review of the current constitutional arrangement that must be part of this process. Whatever the outcome of Brexit negotiations and Scotland's eventual relationship with the UK and the EU, a UK outside the EU is in a fundamentally different constitutional position than it is now. It is our clear view that in this new constitutional landscape, the powers of the Scottish Parliament should be enhanced to reflect and protect Scotland's interests and to ensure the proper functioning of the UK on leaving the EU.

These proposals are presented in the reluctant recognition that as long as Scotland remains part of the UK, the people of Scotland will be unable to enjoy the full benefits of EU membership. However, in line with our commitments, the Scottish Government has shown a willingness to explore compromise proposals that would mitigate the worst damage caused by Brexit. We expect the UK Government to demonstrate similar flexibility in engaging with us on these proposals.

I hope you will give these proposals serious consideration as a constructive contribution to this debate and will encourage others to do likewise. We look forward to working with you on these proposals in the New Year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Sturgeon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

NICOLA STURGEON