

To: First Minister
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Justice
Minister for International Development and Europe
Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe

ATTENDANCE AT THE EUROPA FORUM: LOWER AUSTRIA 9-11 JUNE 2017

OVERVIEW

1. I attended and spoke at the Europa Forum in Lower Austria at the invitation of Austria's Foreign Ministry. The Forum, now in its 22nd year and established on Austrian accession to the EU, is regularly attended by senior Government figures in central and eastern Europe. It provides a platform for discussions on European Affairs, with a view to reconnecting European institutions with the citizens they serve. Security, regional cooperation, economic growth and cultural development are all talking points. The conference was held in the wake of the publication of the European Commission's White Paper on the future of Europe. Following Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria will be holding the EU presidency in the first and second semester of 2018 respectively.

2. This year's forum was well attended by senior Government figures. Sebastian Kurz, Austria's 30 year old Foreign Minister and widely tipped to be Austria's next Chancellor (after October elections) was present along with Austrian Vice Chancellor and Justice Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter. [REDACTED]

3 I met with Dr Brandstetter on the margins of the conference. [REDACTED] During our conversation, we discussed Scotland's distinct Justice system and [REDACTED] I also spoke to Austrian Minister of Interior Mr Wolfgang Sobotka [REDACTED]

3. Other speakers included Ukraine's Foreign Minister, who celebrated the agreement which allows Ukrainians visa-free access to the EU, and Serbia's acting Prime Minister, [REDACTED].

4. Bulgaria's Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform, Ekaterina Zaharieva, spoke powerfully about what the EU had delivered including the freedoms that had been unavailable to those living behind the Iron Curtain. She appealed for an end to Brussels bashing and more investment in explaining how the EU worked to the benefit of its citizens. Whilst reform was needed, collective action was essential around security and defence cooperation and countering extremism. I spoke to Ekaterina on the margins of the conference. [REDACTED] I also spoke to European Commissioner Johannes Hahn who has responsibility for European Neighbourhood Policy and enlargement negotiations. [REDACTED]

5. In other interventions there was a strong emphasis on the role of regions and regional policy in bringing the EU closer to its citizens. The Governor of Lower Austria [REDACTED] majored on this, as did representatives of the Committee of the

Regions, who will visit Scotland on 22 June, and the Bavarian State Minister for European Affairs.

6. My own speech was an opportunity to stress Scotland's pro-EU credentials to a receptive/sympathetic audience, the positive things the EU is delivering as well as our own thoughts on the future, our constitutional journey and the role of young people. I reflected on the General Election result and possible implications for Brexit, emphasising the importance of not conducting our bilateral relations solely through the prism of the Brexit debate. Previously, there had been a number of female keynote contributors and the Governor of Lower Austria was particularly pleased that myself, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister and the Bavarian Foreign Minister had attended.

CONCLUSION AND KEY OUTCOMES

7. [REDACTED]

8. [REDACTED]

9. [REDACTED]

I am copying to Michael Matheson, Alasdair Allan and Mike Russell

GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

- Dr Wolfgang Brandstetter, Austrian Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Justice
- Mr Wolfgang Sobotka, Austrian Minister of Interior
- Ms Ekaterina Zaharieva, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Ms Merle Maigre, Security Policy Adviser to the Estonian President
- Ms Aurora Mejía Errasquín, Deputy General Director for Security, Spanish Government
- Ms Johanna Mikl-Leitner, Governor of Lower Austria
- Ms Barbara Schwarz, President of the Europa Forum Wachau and State Councillor for Social Affairs, Education and Family, Government of Lower Austria
- Mr Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (quick brush-by).
- Dr Beate Merk, State Minister for European Affairs and Regional Relations in the Bavarian State Chancellery.

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS, VISITS & MEETINGS

- Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, First-Vice President of the Committee of the Regions
- Mr Jason Tierney, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy to Austria
- Dr Ulrike Guérot, Head of European Policy, Danube University Krems

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