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ISSUED BY EMAIL

27 November 2018

I am writing to provide you with the Scottish Government's assessment of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement and the political declaration which the UK Government has negotiated with the EU 27.

The Prime Minister has described the agreement as "better than any other option". Our view, as set out in our Assessment of the UK Government's Proposed Future Relationship with the EU, is that that is very far from the case. Indeed the deal on the table is completely unacceptable.

I will not repeat here the full range of concerns articulated in our document. Suffice to say that a Brexit that was supposed to save the UK £350m a week could in reality cost every person in Scotland over £1,600 per year. Our analysis also shows the detrimental impact on the services sector - around three quarters of the Scottish economy; on exporting sectors such as food, fishing and aquaculture; on security and justice; and on public services such as health and care which are dependent on EU citizens.

Nor does the deal provide clarity about the future. It may have taken over two years of intense negotiation to pin down the Withdrawal Agreement but it nevertheless only covers the UK's divorce from the EU. The political declaration which accompanies the Withdrawal Agreement says nothing binding or definitive on the future relationship. So, as predicted, we face a blindfold Brexit, with several more years of damaging uncertainty for people and businesses and a government consumed by these negotiations and their own internal divisions.

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Importantly, our paper debunks the UK Government's dangerous fallacy that it is this deal or no deal. It is becoming clear that the deal on the table has little or no chance of being accepted by the House of Commons. It is also clear that a no deal outcome would be disastrous, and would never be accepted by Westminster.

There are other, better, options. These include either a commitment to ongoing membership of the European Single Market and Customs Union - which the Scottish Government has consistently advocated since 2016 - and holding a second vote including the option to remain in the EU.

There is still time for the UK Government to change course. The Scottish Government will work tirelessly with all those of good will to achieve that. I hope that you will join us in our efforts to secure a better outcome for Scotland and indeed the UK as a whole.

HUMZA YOUSAF

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