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EQUALITY

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Ares(2020)2111471

Dear Ms Somerville,

Dear Ms McKelvie,

Dear Mr Hepburn,

Thank you for your letters expressing the Scottish Government's commitment to remain a proactive partner of the European Union and highlighting the strong synergies between your work in Scotland and the priorities and actions set in the Gender Equality Strategy.

I am grateful for the continued efforts of the Scottish Government to promote gender equality in the European Union and elsewhere. 2020 marks a crucial year for women's rights around the world and I count on Scotland's support to continue and to accelerate our progress towards fairer societies.

This is an equally important moment for women's rights at the European level. Gender equality is a top priority for this Commission and a first key milestone has been the launch of the Gender Equality Strategy.

The Strategy presents objectives and actions aimed at a gender equal Europe and is articulated around three main goals: ensuring freedom from violence and stereotypes; making sure that women and men have equal opportunities to thrive; guaranteeing that women and men have equal chances to lead our European society.

It delivers on a number of crucial issues to advance gender equality in the EU: tackling the gender pay gap and improving pay transparency; promoting gender balance on company boards; achieving better work-life balance for parents and carers; and combating gender-based violence.

The empowerment of women in the labour market is an important priority of the Strategy, and the Commission is presenting actions to close the gender employment and pay gaps. We will table binding measures on pay transparency by the end of 2020. To inform this initiative, the Commission has launched an online public consultation together with the launch of the Strategy, as well as a targeted consultation with Member States and social partners.

The Commission will also continue supporting Member States' work on improving the availability and affordability of formal care services. Women's economic empowerment requires a comprehensive approach and insufficient access to these services is a key driver of gender inequality on the labour market. In addition, we will ensure that Member States correctly transpose and implement the Work-Life Balance Directive.

The Strategy puts a strong emphasis on preventing and combating gender-based violence. Therefore, the EU's accession to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention remains a priority. Should this accession fail, the Commission will present alternative measures for preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting the perpetrators.

Furthermore, we will continue to promote women's representation in decision-making. To help break the glass-ceiling, the Commission will push for the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance on corporate boards. We will also lead by example with a commitment to reach a gender balance of 50% at all levels of the Commission's management by the end of 2024.

Much remains to be done. I am committed, in particular in these times of crisis, to use every tool to promote equality and to strengthen Europe's commitment to inclusion in all of its forms. We can only succeed if we work together as European Institutions, Member States governments, international organisations, third countries, social partners, civil society organisations and individuals. Crises have proven to reinforce inequalities, we need to grasp this momentum and act to change this.

It is with pleasure that I accept your invitation to discuss how the Scottish Government and the EU can work together to advance gender equality. With its work, the Scottish Government is making an important contribution to European values, including on gender equality, both in the EU and globally.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signed)  
Helena Dalli

Ms Shirley-Anne Somerville  
Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People of Scotland

Ms Christina McKelvie  
Minister for Older People and Equalities of Scotland

Mr Jamie Hepburn  
Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills of Scotland