


**CABINET SECRETARY FOR THE CONSTITUTION, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE**

**MEETING WITH BELGIAN AMBASSADOR, BRUNO VAN DER PLUIJM**

<b>What</b>	Meeting with Belgian Ambassador, Bruno van der Pluijm
<b>Where</b>	St. Andrews House, 4W.01
<b>When</b>	Tuesday 27 June 2023, 9:30 am
<b>Key discussion topics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were delighted to see the opening of Flanders Investment and Trade's (FIT) new office in Edinburgh. Belgium is Scotland's sixth biggest international export market, worth £1,270m to the Scottish economy in 2019.</li> <li>• International co-operation is key to developing future hydrogen markets and supporting infrastructure. Belgium is an important partner in this area. We are taking action now to help realise that potential, including: investing in renewable hydrogen projects; working with the Port of Rotterdam and strategic partners on an LOHC transport pilot; supporting the Hydrogen Backbone Link Project (the North Sea hydrogen pipeline connection between Scotland and Europe); developing a Hydrogen Sector Export Plan and working with the UK Government to facilitate trade.</li> <li>• The offshore wind sector has a vital role in decarbonising our energy system and delivering net-zero by 2045. ScotWind is an important step and is the most advanced opportunity to gain first mover advantage on floating wind projects in the world. ScotWind reflects significant market ambition for offshore wind in Scottish waters – almost 28GW across 20 projects.</li> <li>• Belgian students are welcome in Scotland. We recognise their significant contribution to our economy, culture and campuses.</li> <li>• We were pleased to be approached by the Egmont Institute about the development of Belgium's first Arctic policy framework, and would be happy to share expertise and pursue opportunities for collaboration, including at the Arctic Circle Assembly.</li> </ul>
<b>Why</b>	An introductory meeting with the Belgian Ambassador on his first official visit to Scotland.
<b>Supporting official</b>	[Redacted]
<b>Who</b>	<p><b>Bruno van der Pluijm, Belgian Ambassador to the UK</b></p> <p>Van der Pluijm entered the Foreign Service in 1991. From 2016, he was the DG in charge of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid. He was previously Ambassador in Canada and Tunisia, and is a member of the Advisory Group for CERF, a UN humanitarian fund. He has been Belgium's Ambassador to the UK since May 2020.</p> 
<b>Attached documents</b>	Annex A – Core brief Annex B – Belgium country profile

This is the Ambassador's first official visit to Scotland. He was due to also meet FM and Mr Gray last week, but had to reschedule his visit for a week later and neither of their diaries could accommodate the new dates. FM will be visiting Brussels whilst the Ambassador is in Scotland.

There are plans for offshore wind and hydrogen officials to meet with the Ambassador and First Secretary Benjamin Muylaert-Gelein later in the morning.

### Recent engagements

- **22 June 2023 – Ms McAllan** met with the Environment and Climate Minister Zakia Khattabi on her visit to Brussels
- **12 June 2023 – SG officials** from DECC, Offshore Wind and Scotland House Brussels met (virtually) with Energy Minister Van der Straeten's team to provide an overview of our offshore wind projects and associated hydrogen developments. VdS' team indicated that their Minister was very excited about Scotland's potential and the opportunity it might create for Belgium. On our hydrogen export potential they were clear they are interested in pipeline transport rather than shipping. VdS' team said they would come back to us in a few weeks about their key areas of interest in Scotland and how we might structure further cooperation. They said they would also be talking to Minister Eamon Ryan about possible links with Ireland.
- **16 May 2023 – Mr Robertson** met with Energy Minister Tinne Van der Straeten at the Austrian World Summit

### Offshore Wind

- We welcome the commitment of developers to invest an average projection of £1.4bn in Scotland per project, which equates to more than £28bn across the 20 ScotWind offshore wind projects.
- The INTOG offshore wind leasing and planning exercise presents significant opportunities to decarbonise oil and gas production in Scotland while, crucially, enabling the offshore wind sector to expand, innovate and drive forward Scotland's ambition to be a renewables powerhouse.
- We welcome the Crown Estate Scotland announcement made in March 2023 of the successful 13 INTOG applicants, which will be offered exclusivity to develop offshore wind in Scotland's seas.
- Should these developments all come forward, they will add 5.5GW of potential generation capacity to the pipeline of projects in Scotland - up to 449MW for innovation projects and 5GW for targeted oil and gas decarbonisation.
- Through our sectoral marine planning process we are working with stakeholders to consider the potential impacts on the marine environment and other marine sectors from the ScotWind and INTOG leasing rounds, and the mitigation and management that will be required to support the ambitious scale of development.
- Our Sectoral Marine Plan, due to be delivered mid-2024, will set the course for the overall delivery of ScotWind and INTOG, maximising deployment in Scottish waters whilst protecting marine users and our environment.

- We will drive forward offshore wind skills development – working with stakeholders to focus on the opportunities for diversification and skills transfer from our oil and gas sector, in line with our commitment to a Just Transition.
- The Green Jobs Fund will make £100 million of capital investment available to businesses and supply chains across Scotland to help create new green jobs.

## **Hydrogen**

- In addition to our vast renewables potential, Scotland is well-placed in terms of proximity and infrastructure connectivity to key hydrogen import locations in northern Europe, with the potential to become an export hub linking the North Sea region and the north of Europe.
- We do not want Scotland’s position outside the EU to act as a barrier to Scotland realising its full potential as part of the locus of hydrogen production and infrastructure emerging around the North Sea – we would like to see direct pipelines between Scotland and Europe considered as part of the hydrogen supply corridors explored by the European Hydrogen Backbone initiative.
- If the EU is to meet its ambition to import 10 million tonnes of renewable hydrogen by 2030, it will be important to secure future hydrogen exporters – many of whom are Third Countries.

## **Belgian hydrogen ambitions**

- In 2021, Belgium adopted its first hydrogen strategy. Belgium aims to position itself as an important green hydrogen import hub to the rest of Europe, and wishes to become a leader in hydrogen technologies, supporting innovation.
- Belgium view investing in cooperation as a key success factor, and as such seek to work with regional, European and International partners.
- Currently Belgium is investing in the creation of hydrogen transport pipelines with the intention to connect to Germany’s hydrogen pipeline network.

## **Shipping and Ferry Connections**

- We would certainly want to see the introduction of new international ferry connections and are happy to engage with operators. However, any such service would have to operate on a commercially viable basis and this would be a matter for any prospective ferry operator to consider.
- Subsidy control rules limit possible funding by SG to the Freight Facilities Grant (capital funding) and Waterborne Freight Grant (resource start-up funding) schemes. Grant awards under these schemes are dependent on the transfer of freight from road to water and the passenger element cannot be directly subsidised.
- Other challenges around the introduction of direct ferry services from Scotland include the need for a suitable vessel. Potential ferry operators would also need to take into account seasonal fluctuation in demand on routes which are affected by sea and weather conditions.
- The market demand for potential ferry routes is constantly being evaluated by ferry operators and there is the precedent of the DFDS Rosyth-Zeebrugge service operated until 2018, which potential operators can examine to see real data on expected demand.
- We have been meeting with port operators and hauliers to explore how Scottish exporters can have more direct, and resilient, routes to market. The Minister for

Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise chaired stakeholder engagement sessions with key port and airport leaders as well as freight forwarders and logistics companies to gain a better understanding of the size of the opportunity, explore how goods currently get to market and why hauliers choose those routes, and understand the current factors limiting direct services at Scottish ports and their degree of appeal to freight forwarders responsible for shipping Scottish goods.

### **Scottish Education Exchange Programme**

- In 2021-22, there were 330 students from Belgium studying in Scotland.
- SG officials have engaged with policy colleagues and partners from across the education sector to scope out a range of options for a bespoke Scottish programme. SG will be working closely with the education sector in developing a pilot Scottish Education Exchange Programme.
- We are reviewing the impact of the UK Government's Turing Scheme.
- This preparatory work will ensure that a future Scottish programme will help address gaps created by the UK Government's decision to leave Erasmus+.

### **Erasmus+ / Turing**

- It is disappointing that the UK Government's decision not to associate to Erasmus+ currently prevents Scotland from participating fully in its own right.
- The programme had a major impact in Scotland; proportionally more students from Scotland taking part in Erasmus than from any other country in the UK.
- The UKG Turing Scheme does not match the breadth and scope of Erasmus+. It offers no provision for inward mobility to the UK, nor does it offer any provision for staff inward or outward mobility. We will continue to engage with UKG to make Turing better reflect the needs of Scotland.

### **Arctic Policy Framework**

- The Brussels-based Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations is advising the Belgian government on the development of their first Arctic policy framework.
- Egmont researchers, led by former EU Arctic Ambassador Marie-Anne Coninx, reached out to DEXA's Nordic and Arctic Unit to learn from the process that led to the publication of our own Arctic policy framework.
- DEXA and the Egmont have also co-submitted a breakout session proposal for this year's Arctic Circle Assembly focusing on energy security in the North Sea region. Confirmed speakers include Belgian MP Jasper Pillen (Liberal), who tabled the initial resolution urging the Belgian Government to develop an Arctic strategy, and Dutch Arctic Ambassador Rene van Hell. Invited speakers also include Senior Arctic officials from Norway and Denmark and a researcher from the Washington-based Arctic Institute.

**Head of State** – King Philippe

**Belgium Prime Minister** – Alexander De Croo (since Oct 2020)

**Foreign Minister** – Hadja Lahbib (since July 2022)

**Ambassador to UK** – Bruno van der Pluijm (since May 2020)

**UK Ambassador** – Martin Shearman (since June 2019)

### **Key links**

- Scottish exports to Belgium were estimated to be worth £1,250m in 2018, making it Scotland's 5<sup>th</sup> largest export destination.
- Belgium is one of Scotland's priority markets in *A Trading Nation*.
- Existing export strengths include Chemical Sciences, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, Financial & Business Services, Technology, Digital and Media and Food & Drink.
- 2,000 Belgian citizens resident in Scotland (ONS 2020).
- VisitScotland and VisitFlanders have an MoU dating to 2015.
- Flanders Investment and Trade re-opened their Edinburgh office in February 2023, headed by **[Redacted]**.
- SG has had a presence in Brussels for over 20 years through Scotland House Brussels.

### **Gateway<sup>2</sup>Britain**

- On 7 June, it was announced that the Flemish and Federal governments have joined forces to launch Gateway<sup>2</sup>Britain, a new digital platform that helps and supports companies that wish to trade with the UK. The UK is Flanders' biggest non-EU trading partner, but Brexit is still making life difficult for companies due to complex procedures and red tape.

### **Ukraine**

- On 17 May, Flemish Prime Minister Alexander De Croo informed Ukrainian President Zelensky that Belgium cannot supply F-16s but is willing to train Ukrainian pilots. Belgian Defence has stated that Ukraine's requests are being considered as much as possible.

### **UK/Belgian relations**

- The UK and Belgium marked a year of cooperation at Nieuwpoort on 20 June 2023. Belgian officials said more controls and stiffer penalties for human traffickers have reduced the number of transmigrants in the Belgian province of West-Flanders by 90%. However, alertness and further cooperation remain necessary to keep transmigration manageable in the future. Justice Minister Vincent Vanquickenborne (Open Vld – Flemish Liberals), Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden (CD&V – Flemish Christian Democrats), Secretary of State for Migration Nicole de Moor (CD&V – Flemish Christian Democrats) and UK Minister for Migration Robert Jenrick attended the meeting.
- On 30 November 2021, the UK and Belgium signed a Joint Declaration identifying areas to improve co-operation, establishing working groups and annual Foreign Minister bilateral meetings to review progress. The themes of the declaration are shared prosperity, green transition, security, health and biopharma.

## **Politics**

- Belgium will hold the **Presidency of the EU** as of January 2024. This presidency will be shortened due to the campaigning period prior to June 2024 Belgian Federal, Regional and Local elections.  
**[Redacted]**

<b>EU ENGAGEMENT REPORT</b>	
<b>Minister</b>	Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (AR)
<b>Type of engagement</b>	Meeting with Belgian Ambassador, Bruno van der Pluijm (BP)
<b>Date</b>	27 June 2023
<b>Key points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AR raised his recent visit to Brussels and the importance of making connections. Also that the First Minister is currently visiting Brussels.</li> <li>• AR noted the importance of language skills, including the use of Gaelic in Scotland.</li> <li>• BP highlighted this was his first official visit to Scotland which included engagement with SG. He emphasised there are lots of areas they could discuss but wanted to highlight specifically higher education, including the mobility of students, and energy. He noted the majority of his visit was focused on energy.</li> <li>• BP met with Edinburgh University yesterday and found there to be stronger links with Belgium than expected, such as the number of Belgium students studying at the university. BP raised the barriers which prevent Belgian students coming to Scotland. The primary two were fees and legalities.</li> <li>• BP noted the new Taith scheme in Wales and asked what plans Scotland might have. AR stressed the negative impacted the loss of Erasmus has had for Scotland, explaining the challenges in setting up a Scottish scheme, and stressing that the best solution for Scotland would be to re-join Erasmus.</li> <li>• BP noted research co-operation is another valuable element and is concerned that if something is not agreed by summer another academic year will have passed.</li> <li>• BP explained he was attending an offshore wind event that evening, as well as meeting with SG colleagues from Scotwind and hydrogen. He noted that a lot was happening at a policy level and how there were still avenues to explore. AR raised his visit to the Austrian World Summit where he met with the Belgian and Austrian energy ministers. He noted that Belgian and SG officials recently met to discuss avenues for co-operation.</li> <li>• AR explained that Scotland's ambitions in green hydrogen. Scotland wants to be part of the wider European neighbourhood and part of the solution. BP noted this interconnectedness aligns with Belgium and that more international treaties may be required. For example, a multistate treaty was signed with Denmark in 2022.</li> <li>• BP suggested that he would be keen to bring people across from Brussels to Scotland House London. He also highlighted the Embassy are organising a business event in London later this year on energy. They will reach out to Scotland House London closer to the time.</li> </ul>

