Question 1 **ANNEX A**

You requested:

“How much money has the Scottish Government spent on EU flags and EU rules books in 2021, 2022 and 2023 with a breakdown of what the money was spent on?”

This is a formal notice under section 17(1) of FOISA that the Scottish Government does not have the information you have requested.

Question 2 **ANNEX B**

You requested:

"All correspondence and requests from councils and council bodies to the Scottish Government about the £6m swimming pool consequentials from the UK Government, between April 1 2023 and the date of this FOI."

I have included in the response pack copies of some of the information you requested. These documents have been added as attachment to the outgoing email.

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because an exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (Personal Information) applies to a small amount of the information requested. This is because it is the personal data of a third party - in this case, the names and contact details of individuals. Disclosing this information would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

The below table sets out the file names and descriptions of the attached relevant documents.

PDF Document Title	**Description**
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 1	Correspondence from North Lanarkshire Councillors Heather Brannan-McVey & Jean Jones
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 2	Correspondence from Dundee City Council Chief Executive Gregory Colgan
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 3	Correspondence from West Lothian Council Chief Executive Graham Hope
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 4	Correspondence from Renfrewshire Councillor Iain McMillan
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 5	Correspondence from North Lanarkshire Councillor Frank McNally
FOI 202400401180 – Q2 Document 6	Notice of Motion from West Lothian Councillor Kirsteen Sullivan

Question 3 **ANNEX C**

You requested:

"All correspondence between the Scottish Government and Sir Tom Hunter, including internal correspondence about him, notes and minutes from meetings with him, between September 1 2023 and the date of this FOI."

I enclose a copy of some of the information you requested.

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because exemptions under Section 30(b)(i) (free and frank provision of advice) and Section 38 (Personal Information) of FOISA applies to that information.

The exemption under section 30(b)(i) of FOISA (free and frank provision of advice) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit substantially the free and frank provision of advice. This exemption recognises the need for officials to have a private space within which to provide free and frank advice to Ministers and other officials before the Scottish Government reaches a settled public view. Disclosing the content of free and frank advice on funding proposals will substantially inhibit the provision of such advice in the future, particularly because these discussions relate to a sensitive or controversial issue such as prioritisation of Scottish Government funds in a challenging economic situation.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate.

However, there is a greater public interest in allowing a private space within which officials can provide full and frank advice to Ministers and other officials, as part of the process of exploring and refining the Government's position on funding proposals, until the Government as a whole can adopt a decision that is sound and likely to be effective. This private thinking space is essential to enable all options to be properly considered, based on the best available advice, so that good decisions can be taken. Premature disclosure is likely to undermine the full and frank discussion of issues between Ministers and officials, which in turn will undermine the quality of the decision-making process, which would not be in the public interest.

The exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (personal information) applies to a small amount of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, ie the names and contact details of individuals, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to

consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

Document No. 1

From: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>
Sent: Thursday, December 14, 2023 11:48 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Subject: FW: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice] [**OUT OF SCOPE]**

[OUT OF SCOPE]

From: Stephen O'Neill
Sent: 12 December 2023 18:37
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Briefing attached. As discussed, I'll drop Anna a teams message as it might be worth 5 minutes of background on this.

If anything further is needed please don't hesitate.

Thanks

Stephen

Stephen O'Neill
Deputy Director | Entrepreneurship and Innovation Division | Directorate for Economic Development | The Scottish Government | 0300 24 **41324** |

Document No. 2

BRIEFING FOR THE PERMANENT SECRETARY – SCOTTISH EDGE

- **[OUT OF SCOPE]**

We are aware that Sir Tom is displeased that the proposal has not yet been accepted and is likely to convey that to you.

Next steps

- Sir Tom's displeasure notwithstanding, **[OUT OF SCOPE]**

Document No. 3

From: John-Paul Marks <John-Paul.Marks@gov.scot>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 2:46 PM
To: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Cc:** Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: Re: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

Hope Stephen very helpful. That's what I said. Can you keep me posted? Thanks

---

From: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 2:23:26 PM
To: John-Paul Marks <John-Paul.Marks@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

Thanks JP.

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]
Thanks
Stephen

From: John-Paul Marks <John-Paul.Marks@gov.scot>
Sent: 13 December 2023 12:44
To: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Cc:** Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: Re: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

Good briefing thanks - given allocations, **[OUT OF SCOPE]**

From: Stephen O'Neill
Sent: 12 December 2023 18:37
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: Briefing - Perm Sec meeting Sir Tom Hunter

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Briefing attached. As discussed, I'll drop Anna a teams message as it might be worth 5 minutes of background on this.

If anything further is needed please don't hesitate.

Thanks

Stephen

Stephen O'Neill
Deputy Director | Entrepreneurship and Innovation Division | Directorate for Economic Development | The Scottish Government | 0300 24 **41324** |

Document No. 4

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]On Behalf Of Permanent Secretary
Sent: Wednesday, February 7, 2024 11:26 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>
Cc: Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Scottish EDGE/Sir Tom Hunter

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Apologies for the delay, please see letter attached which covers discussion JP had with Tom Hunter.

Kind regards

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION][REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Private Secretary to The Permanent Secretary

The Scottish Government

PermanentSecretary@gov.scot

Scottish Ministers, Special Advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Tuesday, February 6, 2024 11:55 AM
To: Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>
Cc: Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>
Subject: Scottish EDGE/Sir Tom Hunter

Good morning – we are preparing urgent advice for First Minister on Scottish EDGE in response to contact from Sir Tom Hunter. Do you have a readout or minute of the meeting between the Permanent Secretary and Sir Tom that took place in December?

Many thanks

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]The Scottish Government| Directorate for Economic Development | Entrepreneurship Division | Talent and Participation Unit | Widening Participation Team | mobile: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**| email: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Please note I am working from home or office and can be most easily reached by email or Teams. I work Mon-Fri and am online from 9.30am.

Document No. 5

Permanent Secretary
John-Paul Marks

E: permanentsecretary@gov.scot

Sir Tom Hunter

18 December 2023

Dear Tom,

Thank you for the invitation to Blair Castle last week. It was lovely to see you and the team.

I really enjoyed joining the Christmas Get Together, hearing the stories shared with such passion and grace. It was heartfelt, warm and inspiring. Thank you for including us.

I look forward to working with the Hunter Foundation in 2024 on your ambitions plans to help Scotland thrive. I've captured below the things I took away.

Firstly, we will visit Clacks in the New Year with Local Government colleagues to learn more about the outcomes work, and to develop empowerment, building on the Verity House Agreement and Budget 24/25.

We will ensure that the 24/25 Edge forward grant proposal is communicated at the earliest, practical opportunity.

I have asked the Education Team to consider all options for supporting the HTLA programme, noting that the support will ultimately be a decision for Ministers.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]in my Executive Team is exploring the option for us to do an Away Day visit to CentreStage next year; what a fabulous example of empowered, community-led, prevention with fun, passion and great community impact.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION], my Principal Private Secretary, will visit Ms/Miss/Mrs in January to explore the SIP in more detail after an initial discussion with **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**on Wednesday. As we heard, SIP has been pivotal to many projects succeeding; where there is a will there should be a way.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]with thanks will meet with **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**to develop the public sector leadership workshop at Blair in more detail for next year, including some of my senior team. I have discussed this with COSLA and my DGS, and we would value this opportunity with **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**and the team.

Finally, I am happy to confirm that we will arrange for the Scottish Government to join the Kiltwalk Edinburgh event next September, helping to raise money for great causes whilst enjoying Scotland outdoors together. We will look to launch that in the New Year, to encourage as many colleagues who wish to join in.

I wish you and your family a very happy festive season. Scotland continues to make progress, even in tough times. I am always grateful for your leadership, and would like to wish everyone at the Hunter Foundation good luck for the New Year.

Best wishes,

JP Marks
Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government.

Document No. 6

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Wednesday, February 14, 2024 9:49 AM
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance <DFMCSF@gov.scot>; Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade <MinisterSBITT@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Aidan Grisewood <Aidan.Grisewood@gov.scot>; Richard Rollison <Richard.Rollison@gov.scot>;

Andrew Hogg <Andrew.Hogg@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**Suresh Kumar <Suresh.Kumar@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Colin Cook <Colin.Cook@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: FM COMMISSION - URGENT Scottish Edge

Morning Stephen,

Thank you for sending up this advice.

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]
Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Deputy Private Secretary to the First Minister
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG
M: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found here.

All e-mails and attachments sent by a Ministerial Private Office to any other official on behalf of a Minister relating to a decision, request or comment made by a Minister, or a note of a Ministerial meeting, must be filed appropriately by the recipient. Private Offices do not keep official records of such e-mails or attachments.

Scottish Ministers, Special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]On Behalf Of Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Sent: Monday, February 12, 2024 8:34 AM
To: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance <DFMCSF@gov.scot>; Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade <MinisterSBITT@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Aidan Grisewood <Aidan.Grisewood@gov.scot>; Richard Rollison <Richard.Rollison@gov.scot>; Andrew Hogg <Andrew.Hogg@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; ;; Suresh Kumar <Suresh.Kumar@gov.scot>; Colin Cook

<Colin.Cook@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: FM COMMISSION - URGENT Scottish Edge

Morning,

DFM has noted the advice for her interests, **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]**

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Deputy Private Secretary to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance – Shona Robison MSP
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG
M: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]| Email: DFMCSF@gov.scot

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From: Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>
Sent: Thursday, February 8, 2024 9:03 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance <DFMCSF@gov.scot>; Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade <MinisterSBITT@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Aidan Grisewood <Aidan.Grisewood@gov.scot>; Richard Rollison <Richard.Rollison@gov.scot>; Andrew Hogg <Andrew.Hogg@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**;Suresh Kumar <Suresh.Kumar@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Colin Cook <Colin.Cook@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Subject:** RE: FM COMMISSION - URGENT Scottish Edge

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Callum and I have now had the opportunity to discuss the options in more detail and I have adjusted the advice in light of that.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION][OUT OF SCOPE]

Thanks

Stephen

From: Stephen O'Neill
Sent: Wednesday, February 7, 2024 12:27 AM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin Cook <Colin.Cook@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance <DFMCSF@gov.scot>; Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade <MinisterSBITT@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; Permanent Secretary <PermanentSecretary@gov.scot>; Director of Economic Development <DirectorDED@gov.scot>; Aidan Grisewood <Aidan.Grisewood@gov.scot>; Richard Rollison <Richard.Rollison@gov.scot>; Andrew Hogg <Andrew.Hogg@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Anna Kynaston <Anna.Kynaston@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**Suresh Kumar <Suresh.Kumar@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: FM COMMISSION - URGENT Scottish Edge

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Advice attached as requested. Very happy to pick this up with spads and Ministers tomorrow (or today even!).

Thanks

Stephen

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Tuesday, February 6, 2024 9:30 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Stephen O'Neill <Stephen.O'Neill@gov.scot>; Colin Cook <Colin.Cook@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Callum McCaig <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance <DFMCSF@gov.scot>
Subject: FM COMMISSION - URGENT Scottish Edge
Importance: High

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

Thank you for the call. As per out discussion FM has asked for an urgent briefing relating to Scottish EGDE funding.

Sir Tom Hunter has contact FM the salient points he has made are that he is frustrated at the core grant being cut (from £950k to £600k), and **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]**
On that basis FM would like a note from officials, by close of play today and has an expectation that this note should contain a resolution on the matter.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Deputy Private Secretary to the First Minister
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG
M: 07917745045

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found here.

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Document No. 7

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]

Question 4 **ANNEX D**

You requested:

"All correspondence held, including minutes and notes, briefings, about Humza Yousaf and the Scottish Government joining the support for Belarusian politicians, including how much it will cost?"

In responding to your query, it should be made clear that the Scottish Government does not support Belarusian politicians. However, in an effort to be as helpful as possible, I have made the assumption that your query refers to recent endorsement by the First Minister of the Libereco campaign which is about supporting political prisoners in Belarus.

I have set out our response to your request for documents along these lines. To be clear, there is no financial cost in supporting the campaign.

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because exemptions under the following sections of FOISA apply:

- Section 25(1): Information otherwise accessible
- Section 28(1): Relations within the United Kingdom
- Section 30(b)(i): Fair and frank provision of advice
- Section 32(1)(a)(i): International Relations
- Section 38: Personal Information
- Section 39: Health, safety and the environment

I have set out our reasoning for the use of these exemptions below.

An exemption under section 25(1) of FOISA (Information otherwise accessible) applies to some of the information requested because it has already been published on the Scottish Government's website. This information may be found here:

- https://www.gov.scot/news/support-for-belarusian-political-prisoners/

An exemption under section 28(1) of FOISA (Relations within the UK) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially relations between the Scottish Government and the UK Government by revealing candid internal discussion about the other administration's policies. It is essential for the effective administration of the UK as a whole that there should be regular, and often private, communications between the Scottish Government, the UK Government and the other devolved governments. Disclosure of this information would mean that the UK Government would be likely to be more reluctant to communicate as frequently and openly with the Scottish Government in future.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in maintaining close working relationships between the Scottish Government and the UK Government, and in protecting the free exchange of information between the administrations to ensure that we keep each other fully and regularly informed about matters of mutual interest, such as the situation in Belarus. There is no public interest in disclosing information when that will damage relationships and disrupt future communications as that may impact on the effectiveness of future policy development and implementation work.

An exemption under section 30(b)(i) of FOISA (free and frank provision of advice) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit substantially the free and frank provision of advice. This exemption recognises the need for officials to have a private space within which to provide free and frank advice to Ministers before the Scottish Government reaches a settled public view. Disclosing the content of free and frank advice on our engagement with stakeholders will substantially inhibit the provision of such advice in the future, particularly because these discussions relate to such a sensitive issue as political prisoners in Belarus.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption for some of this information. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing a private space within which officials can provide full and frank advice to Ministers. This private thinking space is essential to enable all options to be properly considered, based on the best available advice, so that good decisions can be taken. Disclosure of some of this information is likely to undermine the full and frank discussion of issues between Ministers and officials, which in turn will undermine the quality of the policy making process, which would not be in the public interest. However, in the case of some of the information to which this exemption applies, we have found that the public interest lies in its disclosure and so has not been redacted from the final release.

An exemption under section 32(1)(a)(i) of FOISA (international relations) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially relations between the United Kingdom and Belarus. The effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between the UK Government and other States.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have

found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in ensuring that the UK Government is able to maintain good relations with other States, in order to protect and promote UK interests abroad.

An exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (Personal information) applies to some of the information requested because it is the personal data of a third party, ie names and contact details, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

An exemption under section 39(1) of FOISA (Health, safety and the environment) applies to some of the information requested because release of this information would, or would likely, endanger the physical or mental health or the safety of the individual concerned.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in ensuring that the health (physical and mental) and safety of an individual is protected and should not be put at risk.

Correspondence

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Monday, October 2, 2023 4:40 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Thanks **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** – please do let me know as I am conscious we only have the FM on the 10th and 19th (day of meeting) during Oct recess.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Deputy Private Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG **| [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Tuesday, September 26, 2023 3:39 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

Many thanks for sending the Teams invite. Please be advised that the invite has been shared with our contact.

Noted on the timeline for briefing. I think it's a 'yes' to a timeslot for a photo, but I need to discuss further with Comms colleagues.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Senior Policy Officer – China
International Division DEXA| Scottish Government
Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ | M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Friday, September 22, 2023 2:26 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scotCommunications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Thanks **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] – I've sent you and **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** the MS Teams invite and you can let me know nearer who will provide the official support. Grateful if this link can be passed on to Ms Tsikhanouskaya's team please? Could we also have the briefing note by 1600 on 16th Oct please?

I understand there's a Comms plan being developed for this, let me know if we need to set aside a timeslot for an FM photo?

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Deputy Private Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG **|** **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, September 21, 2023 9:37 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;;

Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>;
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] /all

Just to say that the FSU (Russia, Belarus, Central Asia, Armenia/Azerbaijan) has now passed to **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** in **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** team. I'll be talking **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** through this topic today.

All the best,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Monday, September 4, 2023 10:38 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Hi all,

Just to lend my two cents to **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** – I agree that we would be best placed to announce tied to the meeting rather than separately. To my knowledge this FM has not yet met Ms Tsikhanouskaya and so the meeting would provide a firm hook around which to place the announcement.

19 October would also be during the October Parliamentary Recess so we may face a less crowded news agenda against which to place the story.

Best,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
m: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Senior Media Manager | First Minister | Scottish Government |
media enquiries (call group): 0300 244 9020 | Media enquiries – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Monday, August 28, 2023 2:16 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] (and those in cc)

The meeting was originally arranged at the request of the FM when he agreed to undertake Godparenting responsibility for Belarusian political prisoners alongside other ministers, the idea being that the announcement would be made on the back of the meeting. The NGO is asking whether or not we can make the announcements before the meeting – **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i) – FREE AND FRANK PROVISION OF ADVICE]**

My view is that it would be a good package to announce together in October rather than separate from the call, but would welcome everyone's views. We'll need to get the photos together of the FM and ministers holding the messages of support.

All the best,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] **|Team Leader, International Relations |Directorate for External Affairs|Scottish Government, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ |Tel [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Friday, August 25, 2023 8:53 AM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Confirming that 1600 on 19 October works for Ms Tsikhanouskaya.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] **|Team Leader, International Relations |Directorate for External Affairs|Scottish Government, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ |Tel [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Monday, August 21, 2023 5:26 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good afternoon **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

As per our teams conversation, we need to move the meeting with Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya.

Can we look at 16.00 on the 19th October?

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] **Diary Secretary**
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor | St Andrews House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, August 3, 2023 12:31 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good afternoon **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice] We're just awaiting Svietlana's office confirming that time is suitable for them.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] *Canada, Australasia & FSU Desk Officer*
International Relations | Directorate for External Affairs | Scottish Government
Work mobile: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Thursday, August 3, 2023 11:39 AM

To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION],

The First Minister is content. **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]**

We are holding 1430-1500 on 21st Aug for a virtual call with Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Deputy Private Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG **| [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Friday, July 21, 2023 10:10 AM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>;
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Thanks **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

I've asked Ken if that date works. Can I just check – has the FM agreed to godparent Mr Halavacz?

Regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] **|Team Leader, International Relations |Directorate for External Affairs|Scottish Government, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ |Tel [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister

Sent: Thursday, July 20, 2023 2:49 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good afternoon **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

In **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** absence, would we be able to set this as a virtual meeting in the afternoon on 21st August?

Kind Regards,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Diary Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor | St Andrews House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Monday, July 10, 2023 2:16 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good afternoon,

I hope you're well, I wanted to follow up on the below to see if there are any dates where the First Minister is available to talk to Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya?

Liberico has now identified a political prisoner for whom they propose the First Minister acts as godparent:

1. The attached submission recommended that the First Minister participate in a programme organised by the human rights NGO *Libereco,* to support political prisoners in Belarus. Following the First Minister's agreement to participate, Liberico has now identified a political prisoner for the First Minister to godparent. **Officials therefore recommend that the First Minister agrees to act as a 'godparent' to Belarusian political prisoner Dzmitryi Halavacz.**

2. Dzmitryi Halavach is a member of the band TOR Band rock group who were very active in the protests in 2020. He and the two other band members were detained on 28 October 2022.

3. The detainees were sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest on several consecutive occasions, then transferred to a remand prison. While the musicians were in prison, their rock band was branded an "extremist formation". He is currently awaiting trial and sentencing.

ENDS

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] *Canada, Australasia & FSU Desk Officer*
International Relations | Directorate for External Affairs | Scottish Government
Work mobile: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Friday, June 2, 2023 11:33 AM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Crawford E (Ewan) <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine – Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good morning **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

I hope your well! Unfortunately Svietlana does not have any plans to visit Scotland in the coming future, but would be very happy to have a video call with the First Minister.

I would also recommend and support Ken McBain and Irina McLean, from the People's Consulate of Belarus and Libereco NGO attending the meeting to support Svietlana. They attended the previous meeting with Svietlana and officials have been working closely with them on the godparenting scheme.

Briefing and support can be provided for this meeting and Svietlana's team are keen for yourselves to propose some suitable dates and times for a call.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] *Canada, Australasia & FSU Desk Officer*
International Relations | Directorate for External Affairs | Scottish Government
Work mobile: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: 22 May 2023 20:58
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <MinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>; Wightman S (Scott) <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Primrose J (John) <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Crawford E (Ewan) <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
The First Minister is content to be involved in this scheme, however, he suggests that it may be helpful to arrange a call with Ms Tsikhanouskaya before announcing so he can make an introduction.

I should be grateful if you would consider arrangements, briefing and support for such a call before engaging further with FMPO to find a suitable date.

Many thanks

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Unit Head, Ministerial Private Office
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG
T: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] | M: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] | Email: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: 22 May 2023 11:21
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <MinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>
Subject: Routine - Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners

Good morning FMPO,

Please see attached submission on Godparenting Belarusian Political Prisoners and supporting background meeting note, for the First Ministers consideration.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] *Canada, Australasia & FSU Desk Officer*
International Relations | Directorate for External Affairs | Scottish Government
Work mobile: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Monday, December 4, 2023 12:02 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; ; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine: Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

We could do Tuesday 23rd January at 1530?

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Diary Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG | **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found here.

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Wednesday, November 29, 2023 4:14 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon

<Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: RE: Routine: Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

We have just heard from Ms Tsikhanouskaya's office that unfortunately she is not available on 9 January.

They have suggested 22 – 26 January.

I appreciate that FM's diary will be really busy. Would a date in the above window work, otherwise please let us know if there a couple of other slots early(ish) in the new year that we could discuss with her office.

Thanks and best wishes

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Asia Team Leader
Scottish Government International Division
2-H South, Victoria Quay
Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ

+ 44 **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** (Weds-Thurs)
+ 44 **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Wednesday, November 22, 2023 11:49 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **Subject:** RE: Routine: Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Good morning,

Thank you for your email.

FM's diary is very busy until the end of the year. Would Ms Tsikhanouskaya be able to do 1600 on 9th January?

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Diary Secretary
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor | St Andrews House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2023 6:24 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Subject:** Routine: Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Hello,

Please can you advise as to whether FM is still content to reschedule a call with Ms Tsikhanouskaya. I'd be grateful if you can advise on a suitable date for a meeting.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Friday, November 3, 2023 4:44 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle

<Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **Subject:** RE: Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Good afternoon,

For information, we have been informed by Libereco that Dzmitryi Halavach has been handed a nine year sentence. Ms Tsikhanouskaya has publicly condemned the sentencing.

With this news Libereco are keen to move forward with FM and Ministers participation in the #WeStandBYyou campaign. The recommendation is to do a release once a meeting with Tsikhanouskaya has taken place.

Please let me know whether Monday 20th November or Tuesday 21st November may be suitable for an online meeting. Or advise on an alternative date.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2023 4:26 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **Subject:** Diary Request – Rescheduled meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Good afternoon,

Ms Tsikhanouskaya's team are keen to reschedule as soon as possible and have offered to hold a call on one of the following days:
Friday 3rd November
Monday 20th November
Tuesday 21st November.

Please advise if FM is available for a call on any of those days.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2023 12:42 PM

To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**
Subject: RE: Briefing – Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 19 Oct

Good afternoon,

I have been advised by Ms Tsikhanouskaya's team that we will need to look for an alternative date for this meeting. 30 October is no longer a possibility. I will get back to you with suggested alternatives when I have them.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, October 19, 2023 2:34 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**
Subject: RE: Briefing – Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 19 Oct

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

Does FM have any availability on Monday 30 October for this call?

Thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Thursday, October 19, 2023 12:56 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL**

INFORMATION]; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**
Subject: RE: Briefing – Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 19 Oct

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

Thank you for the update, as discussed I have cancel the meeting from FMs diary and look out for your email on alternative dates.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Deputy Private Secretary to the First Minister
Office of the First Minister
5th Floor **|** St Andrews House **|** Regent Road **|** Edinburgh **|** EH1 3DG
M: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

Office of the First Minister of Scotland
FirstMinister.gov.scot
Prìomh Mhinistear na h-Alba

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From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, October 19, 2023 12:48 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**
Subject: RE: Briefing - Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 19 Oct

Hello,

I have just been notified that due to a rescheduled flight that Ms Tsikhanouskaya will no longer be able to attend this meeting as scheduled.

I have asked for future availability and will get back to you to coordinate a rescheduled date.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Monday, October 16, 2023 3:37 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; Donna MacKinnon <Donna.MacKinnon@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Kevin Pringle <Kevin.Pringle@gov.scot>
Subject: Briefing - Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 19 Oct

Good afternoon,

Please find attached a briefing for FM for his online meeting with Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on 19 October.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Senior Policy Officer – International Relations
International Division DEXA| Scottish Government
Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ | M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Monday, January 22, 2024 12:24 PM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <zzMinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: Routine – Ministerial Submission: Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION],

Thank you for the submission, which the First Minister has noted. The FM is content to support the campaign, and has asked whether a short video recording explaining his support would be helpful. Could we please get some advice/thoughts on this.

Thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Private Secretary to the First Minister
5th Floor | St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG
M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found here.

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Scottish Ministers, Special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 5:14 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <MinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Subject:** Routine – Ministerial Submission: Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

FAO
First Minister
Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing, Economy, Fair Work and Energy
Minister for Culture, Europe and International
Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees

Please find attached a submission on the #WeStandByyou social media campaign in support of Belarusian political prisoners.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Senior Policy Officer – International Relations
International Division DEXA| Scottish Government
Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ | M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Tuesday, January 23, 2024 8:08 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <zzMinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: FOR FM CLEARANCE // Quote in news release - Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION],

The First Minister has cleared the proposed quote ahead of today's news release.

Thanks,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION] Private Secretary to the First Minister

5th Floor | St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG
M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Monday, January 22, 2024 11:51 AM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]; Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <MinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>; Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: FOR FM CLEARANCE // Quote in news release - Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

FMPO,
Cc for awareness: other Pos / Ministers who are participating in the political prisoner adoption programme…

Good morning,

Further to **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**'s submission, comms has prepared the below FM quote to run in a news release to be issued by Liberico tomorrow announcing the First Minister as the first leader of a government to participate in the political prisoner adoption programme, which officials and SpAds are content with.

Comms will also prepare social media handling to accompany the announcement, which will be shared with FMPO for awareness. This will include the linked photo here: https://spaces.hightail.com/space/kzin2vJ2Sd of FM holding up his adoptee's name and the Liberico logo as is the accepted style for participation in the programme. The photo will also issue with the news release below.

The news release and social media handling will issue after the FM's meeting with Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya on Tuesday 23 January 2024. Constitution comms colleagues are also prepping a SG news release, in Mr Robertson's name, covering broader SG ministerial involvement.

For awareness, Liberico also intends to give some Scottish press contacts who have previously covered the situation in Belarus (who work primarily with the *Scotsman* and *Herald*) a heads up that the announcement of the FM's participation is coming this week.

I'd be grateful for FM's clearance of the below quote **today if possible** to enable the arrangements to progress.

Many thanks,
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

[REDACTED – S.25 INFORMATION OTHERWISE ACCESSIBLE]
Press Release - Announcement of Support of Scotland's First Minister for Belarusian Political Prisoner

First Minister of Scotland meets Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya and becomes first head of government to "godparent" a Belarusian Political Prisoner

Also, as part of our #WeStandBYyou campaign Humza Yousaf (First Minister of Scotland) becomes a godparent for Belarusian political prisoner Dzmitryi Halavacz, who has been held for a year in prison. Dzmitryi is a member of TOR Band, a rock group who were involved in the pro-democracy protests in 2020. In January last year the Lukashenko regime declared the band "extremist" and in October last year Dzmitryi was sentenced to 9 years in prison.

Humza Yousaf, First Minister of Scotland
<< quote and photo of First Minister >>

Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya, the elected leader of Belarus
"I would like to express my deep appreciation to First Minister Hamza Yusuf for the warmth of your support of Dzmitryi Halavacz through Libereco's godparenting program. Your compassionate stance towards Belarusian political prisoners is really touching. Together, we embrace the warmth of solidarity in the pursuit of freedom and justice."

Additional text that can be used for UK media
Libereco's godparent campaign matches European parliamentarians with individual Belarusian political prisoners. So far, the Belarusian human rights organisation Viasna has declared more than 4,500 people to have been persecuted for political reasons. Currently, over 1,400 people are political prisoners in Belarus, according to Viasna. Scotland's First Minister is the first head of government to join the campaign, and he is also setting a milestone by becoming the 400th godparent. Since 2020 the Libereco godparents have written to prisoners, spoken to prisoners' families and campaigned about their prisoners in parliaments and in the media.

https://www.libereco.org/en/belarus-gefangene-patenschaften-prisoners-godparenthood/

Libereco is a human rights organisation that is dedicated to the protection of human rights in Belarus and Ukraine. The godparent campaign was started in July 2020 in response to the political repressions already happening before the presidential election in August. After the rigged voting, after which the authoritarian head of state Alexander Lukashenko declared himself the winner, the situation has worsened.

Thousands of people were arbitrarily arrested during the ongoing and nationwide peaceful protests against Lukashenko.These repressions have continued and now include many people who resist Belarus' involvement and support for the war in Ukraine.

https://www.libereco.org/en/ueber-libereco/

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]m: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Senior Media Manager | First Minister | Scottish Government |
media enquiries (call group): 0300 244 9020 | Media enquiries – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 5:14 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs & Culture <CabSecforCEAC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work & Energy <CabSecWEFWE@gov.scot>; Minister for Culture, Europe & International Development <MinisterforCEID@gov.scot>; Minister for Equalities, Migration & Refugees <MinisterEMR@gov.scot>
Cc: Ewan Crawford <Ewan.Crawford@gov.scot>; Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]** Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Subject:** Routine - Ministerial Submission: Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

FAO
First Minister
Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing, Economy, Fair Work and Energy
Minister for Culture, Europe and International
Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees

Please find attached a submission on the #WeStandByyou social media campaign in support of Belarusian political prisoners.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Senior Policy Officer – International Relations
International Division DEXA| Scottish Government
Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ | M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

gov.scot

Briefings/Submissions

From: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION**
External Affairs+International Relations
22 May 2023

First Minister

Godparenting a Belarusian Political Prisoner

1. Priority and Purpose

1. Routine. Supporting political prisoners in Belarus.

Recommendation

2. Officials recommend that the First Minister agrees to act as a 'godparent' to a political prisoner in Belarus.

Context and Issues

3. The former First Minister met Belarusian opposition leader Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya on 29 September 2022 **[Meeting note attached to email]** and agreed to participate in a scheme where politicians act as "godparents" for political prisoners in Belarus. The scheme is organised by human rights NGO *Libereco* where politicians use their profile to offer moral support to prisoners and maintain pressure on the Lukashenko regime.

4. The former First Minister, Cabinet Secretary Robertson, Cabinet Secretary Gray and Minister McKelvie had all agreed to 'godparent' political prisoners. The announcements were due to be made on the 25 March, but did not go ahead due to the leadership election.

5. The godparenthood would involve an announcement on both Scottish Government and *Libereco* channels with the FM showing support for both the prisoner and the campaign, and also the option of writing to the prisoner periodically.

6. **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice & S.32(1)(a)(i) : International Relations]**The positive impact on the prisoners' morale and wellbeing - knowing they had not been forgotten - was cited as an important aspect of the programme. Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya's explicit support of this programme offered another layer of reassurance.

7. Over 300 European politicians are involved in the programme, however the FM would be the first head of government to take part **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice & S.32(1)(a)(i) : International Relations]**. Scottish parliamentarians involved include MSPs Willie Rennie, Liam McArthur and Alex Burnett; Westminster MPs Christine Jardine, Jamie Stone and Wendy

Chamberlain MP, and Baroness Kennedy and Lord Foulkes. **[REDACTED – S.32 International Relations]**

Bute House Agreement Implications

8. «None»

Financial and Legal Considerations

9. This would not carry a financial cost. Officials will work through the logistics of writing and sending the letters with Libereco.

Sensitivities

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice & S.32(1)(a)(i) : International Relations]
Quality Assurance

10. This Submission has been approved by John Primrose.

Conclusions and next Steps

11. If the First Minister is content, officials will work with the NGO to identify a suitable political prisoner. A new submission detailing comms plans, announcement dates and a quote for the press release will be sent for the First Minister's consideration.

12. Officials will also send refresher submissions to Mr Robertson, Mr Gray and Ms McKelvie to confirm they are still content to move ahead with the announcement and we will also ask Ms Roddick if she would like to participate in her role as Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION «External Affairs+International Relations»
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION

Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers Copy List	**For Action**	**For Information Portfolio interest**	**For Information Constituency interest**	**For Information General awareness**
Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture		«Yes»		
Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development		Yes		
		Yes		

Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers Copy List	For Action	For Information Portfolio interest	For Information Constituency interest	For Information General awareness
Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees		Yes		

Officials Copy List
Scott Wightman John Primrose **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION** Stuart Adam **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION** International Strategic Comms **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION** Emily Mackintosh Ewan Crawford

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

First Minister Meeting with Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya – 29 September 2022

The First Minister met Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarusian opposition leader, on 29 September 2022

Attendees:
Svietlana Tsikhanouskaya
Franak Viachorka – Belarusian Politian
Denis Kuchynski – Senior Foreign Affairs Officer
Ken McBain – People's Consulate of Belarus
Irina McLean – People's Consulate of Belarus

The meeting commenced with the First Minister and Ms Tsikhanouskaya (ST) giving a short statement and video for the media.

Scotland's support for Belarus

The meeting commenced with FM showing her support and solidarity for the people of Belarus against the Lukashenko regime's oppression. Scotland stood in support of democratic freedom, including acknowledging ST as the rightful winner of the 2020 election. FM was keen to hear about ways she could support.

ST and her team made several suggestions for Scottish Government support.

Political Prisoners

ST suggested writing to political prisoners in Belarus, through an organisation called Libereco. FM was very positive and expressed keenness to share the idea with colleagues to raise awareness. ST also spoke about the package Germany was offering recently released political prisoners and asked if the FM could consider doing something similar in Scotland, perhaps through humanitarian funding. ST's team have share more information with officials.

Visas for Belarusians

ST praised Scotland's response to Ukrainians fleeing the war, and noted how supportive Scotland had been. She wanted to know if it was possible to set up a similar scheme for Belarusians refugees fleeing the regime.

FM was clear that whilst we can offer support and a warm welcome to those coming to Scotland, any decisions regarding visas are not within the Scottish Government's powers. She could however, lobby the UK Government to consider this and once Belarusians arrived in Scotland, provide as warm a welcome as possible.

Sharing learning

ST explained that due to the nature of Lukashenko's regime, they struggle to understand how legitimate governments and parliaments functioned and remain accountable. She asked if there were any specialists who could share learning about how the Scottish Government works, or if there were internships or shadowing opportunities for Belarusians to about the workings of government.

FM discussed a number of available options, including potentially creating a bespoke scheme. First, we could share a number of programmes that already exist, for example the Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship Programme, which provides peacekeeping, negotiation and reconstruction training to women in areas of conflict. FM committed to sharing more information.

FM also spoke about the Belarusian human rights defender welcomed to Scotland last year as part of the Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship programme. ST was not aware of the programme so FM committed to share more information.

Another option is the sharing of learning. FM spoke about the Scottish Parliament's relatively recent establishment. We were still learning so could share our experiences.

Belarusians in Scotland

As of the last census there were 400 Belarusians in Scotland. Irina said that she ran a "peoples consulate of Belarus" from her home. She asked if FM would be able to support the consulate and raise awareness of its presence, alongside raising awareness of the problems Belarusians faced.

ST suggested that a way to raise awareness would be to ensure Belarusians are considered when we are planning events. FM referenced EIF, where Belarusian

musicians and performers could participate. FM mentioned the Ukraine Freedom Orchestra which SG supported at the Edinburgh Festival as an example.

Denis spoke about Scotland and Belarus' long shared history, and that there were many Belarusians with Scottish heritage, evidenced through the use of Scottish surnames. In addition, Belarus' national instrument is similar to Scotland's bagpipes.

Irina also spoke about the funding received from Creative Scotland and how it was helping them share their stories through culture. More opportunities could be available, for example through book translations.

Closing

ST was clear that she wanted to connect with Scotland. Putin and Lukashenko's regimes would not last forever, but the connections we made now would outlast them.

The meeting concluded with FM reiterating her commitment to supporting freedom and sovereignty in Belarus. She wanted to provide support wherever we could. Not all ideas discussed today may be practical, but she would consider them all.

Actions

Officials are already in contact with the People's Consulate of Belarus and will follow up on the suggestions made during the meeting. Once additional information is received from ST and her team, officials will consider all the proposals and consult ministers.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]International Relations

From: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
DEXA, International Relations
17 January 2024

First Minister
Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing, Economy, Fair Work and Energy
Minister for Culture, Europe and International
Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees

#WeStandBYYou Campaign - Support for Belarusian Political Prisoners

Priority and Purpose

1. Routine – to update Ministers on the planned social media campaign to support political prisoners in Belarus.

Recommendation

2. Recommends that you: support the #WeStandBYYou campaign by posting support from personal social media accounts and act as “godparents” to Belarusian political prisoners.

Context and Issues

3. First Minister will meet with Belarusian opposition figure Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on 23 January.

4. Ministers have previously agreed to take part in the *Libereco* ‘godparenting’ scheme to support Belarusian political prisoners. We will use the First Minister/ Tsikhanouskaya meeting on the 23 January to act as a hook to raise the profile of this campaign and highlight human rights abuses in Belarus.

5. The *#WeStandBYYou* campaign is organised by human rights NGO *Libereco.* The campaign has politicians use their profile to offer moral support to those imprisoned and maintain pressure on the Lukashenko regime.

6. Over 300 European politicians are involved in the programme, however the First Minister will be the first head of government to take part. Scottish parliamentarians involved include MSPs Willie Rennie, Liam McArthur and Alex Burnett.

[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]

7. The latest on political prisoners that Ministers will ‘godparent’ can be found in ANNEX A.

Options Considered and Advice

8. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]** The positive impact on the prisoners' morale and wellbeing – knowing they had not been forgotten – was cited as an important aspect of the programme.

9. The First Minister's involvement will likely bring significant media attention, both in Scotland and in independent Belarusian media. *Libereco* would want to publish its own press release and ask for an image of FM bearing the campaign logo with Dzmitryi's name and a short statement. We would co-ordinate the activity for maximum impact.

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]

10. Should Ministers wish to make contact, in personal capacity, with the family of political prisoners, *Libereco* can help facilitate this. Officials will be able to liaise with *Libereco* to connect Ministers.

Assessment of Options

11. Participation in this campaign is unlikely to cause any negative impact and it in line with Scottish Government's policy to promote human rights internationally.

Bute House Agreement Implications

12. None

Verity House Agreement Implications

13. None

Financial and Legal Considerations

14. This activity does not carry any financial cost.

Sensitivities

15. **REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): International Relations]**

16. FCDO is familiar with *Libereco* and their work with Belarusian diaspora. They are aware of the campaign and 'godparenting' scheme, with a number of Westminster MPs taking part.

Quality Assurance

17. This Submission has been approved by John Primrose

Conclusions and next Steps

18. If First Minister is content, officials will prepare for a social media post supporting Dzmitryi Halavacz to be posted and a comment for a *Libereco* press release.

19. Other Ministers are free to participate in the campaign on their personal social media accounts using the recommended photos format if they so wish.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]DEXA, International Relations
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers Copy List	**For Action**	**For Information Portfolio interest**	**For Information Constituency interest**	**For Information General awareness**
First Minister	X			
Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture	X			
Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing, Economy, Fair Work and Energy	X			
Minister for Culture, Europe and International	X			
Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees	X			

Officials Copy List
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Scott Wightman John Primrose **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**Communications First Minister International Strategic Comms

ANNEX A

Dzmitryi Halavacz – Supported by First Minister

In October 2023 Dzmitryi Halavacz was sentenced to nine years in prison. He was found guilty, in a closed-door trial, of 'inciting hatred, being a member of an extremist group, discrediting the country and insulting President Lukashenko'.

He is one of three members of the music group, *TOR Band*. The band was labelled by the State as an extremist group. All three members of the band were arrested October 2022 and are now serving sentences. Dzimitryi's wife has had contact with Libereco.

Eduard Babaryka – Supported by Mr Robertson

Eduard Babaryka headed the 2020 election campaign team of his father, Viktar Babaryka. He was arrested on June 18, 2020, together with his father, on their way to the Central Election Commission, by the Department for Financial Investigations of the State Control Committee.

On 5 July 2023 Eduard received an 8 year prison sentence. He has also been listed on the Ministry of Internal Affairs extremist list and on the KGB terrorist list since December 2023.

Siarhai Vaitsiuk – Supported by Mr Gray

Siarhai is serving a 2.5 years sentence in prison. He is the first Belarusian convicted for wanting to volunteer to help Ukraine fight the Russian invasion.

Natallja Dulina – Supported by Ms McKelvie

Natallja is an associate professor of Italian Language. She was detained in early October 2022 and accused of assisting extremist activities. She has been sentenced to 3.5 years in prison.

Volha Tserakh – Supported by Ms Roddick

In September 2022 Volha was arrested for flying the Ukrainian and free Belarus flags from a building in Minsk. In March 2023 she was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for her actions.

BRIEFING FOR THE FIRST MINISTER

Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarusian opposition figure

23 January 2024

Key message	Support for democratic freedom and condemn human rights abuses in Belarus Support for political prisoners in Belarus through "Libereco" 'godparenting' scheme
What	Meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya [svet-lah-na teek-an-ov-sky-eh], Belarusian opposition figure
Why	To make an introduction to Ms Tsikhanouskaya ahead of announcing support for Belarusian political prisoners via Libereco
Who	**Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**, Belarusian opposition figure **Ken McBain** of "People's Consulate for Belarus in Scotland" and "Libereco" human rights NGO
Where	Online via MS Teams
When	15:30 – 16:00, 23 January 2024
Likely themes	Democracy and human rights in Belarus Update on the situation of political prisoners
Media	SG Comms is recommending social media handling for this meeting, as part of a broader comms handling strategy around FM and other Ministers sponsoring Belarusian Political Prisoners
Supporting official	**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**– **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Attached documents	Annex A – Agenda and Summary Annex B – Points to make Annex C – Background Annex D - Biographies

Agenda and Summary **ANNEX A**

Agenda

There is no formal agenda for this meeting. Talking points will focus on the current situation in Belarus, human rights issues and how Scotland might support those oppressed in Belarus and those now living in exile. Ken McBain from the NGO *Libereco* will also be on the call.

Summary

This will be First Minister's first engagement on Belarus human right issues.

Ms Tsikhanouskaya met former-FM in September 2022. In that meeting Tsikhanouskaya asked former-FM to consider supporting political prisoners in Belarus via human rights NGO *Libereco*, through their 'godparenting' scheme. FM and four other Scottish Ministers have committed to supporting Belarusian political prisoners and will take part in the #WeStandBYyou campaign.

Libereco identified Dzmitryi Halavacz as a political prisoner for FM to 'godparent'. Ken McBain of People's Consulate for Belarus in Scotland and *Libereco* will provide the latest update on Dzmitryi Halavacz, including a message from Halavacz's wife, to the FM.

Following the meeting, media in support of *Libereco's* #WeStandByYou social media campaign will be posted. A *Libereco* press release will also highlight First Minister's participation in the campaign.

(Note: Mr Robertson, Ms McKelvie, Ms Roddick and Mr Gray have also committed to joining the scheme.)

Sensitivities

[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): International Relations]

Points to make **ANNEX B**

Key points:

- Scotland stands for democracy, human rights and the rule of law at home and abroad.

- The Scottish Government does not recognise the result of the fraudulent 2020 Belarusian Presidential Election and unequivocally condemns abuses carried out by the Lukashenko regime against the Belarusian people.

- I applaud your bravery in standing-up to Lukashenko, despite the risks you face.

[REDACTED – S. 28: Relations within the United Kingdom]

- Scottish Ministers will be showing they stand in solidarity with political prisoners through the "Libereco" 'godparenting' scheme.

Support for Human Rights in Belarus;

- The Scottish Government condemns human rights abuses carried out by the Belarusian regime. We support the UK in demanding the regime releases political prisoners.

- The right to peaceful protest and respect for freedom of expression, including media freedom, are both fundamental and universal human rights which must be protected .

[REDACTED – S. 28: Relations within the United Kingdom]

- In 2022 we were delighted to welcome a Belarusian human rights defender to Scotland as part of our Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship programme.

Libereco 'godparenting' scheme:

- I, and four other Scottish Ministers, have committed to standing in solidarity with political prisoners through *Libereco's* 'godparenting' scheme.

- It is important that these political prisoners know they have not been forgotten and that we continue to raise the profile of these serious human rights abuses perpetrated by the Lukashenko regime.

- Dzmitryi [DI-MI-TREE] has been handed a nine-year prison sentence – simply for exercising his freedom to speak out, and protest. I hope that by shining a light on what him and others are facing in Belarus, I and the government I lead, can raise awareness of and support for him, and for the thousands of other political prisoners in Belarus.

Visas for Belarusians:

[REDACTED – S. 28: Relations within the United Kingdom]

- I understand that Belarusian consulates have withdrawn services for renewing passports abroad. This is a grievous action which has serious ramifications for Belarusians abroad and in exile.

Supporting opportunities for learning:

- **[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]**However, we can connect you with organisations operating within Scotland that may facilitate learning.

- The Scottish Council on Global Affairs (SCoGA), hosted by three Scottish Universities, is an international relations institute which provides a hub for informed, non-partisan debate on all areas of global affairs. We can connect you to academics at the institute who would be happy to link you to some relevant experts and facilitate a knowledge exchange.

If raised:

Visas for Belarusians:

- I understand that Belarusian consulates have withdrawn services for renewing passports abroad. This is a grievous action which has serious ramifications for Belarusians abroad and in exile.

[REDACTED – S. 28: Relations within the United Kingdom]

Belarus's involvement in Ukraine war:

- The Scottish Government shares the international community's concerns about Belarus' collaboration with, and support for, Russia's invasion into Ukraine. The Scottish Government condemned Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of a peaceful, democratic, and sovereign neighbour, in the strongest possible terms.

- As soon as the conflict began, the Scottish Government and its agencies took action going beyond the formal sanctions regime, for example stopping all export support activities linked to Russia.

We have welcomed thousands of displaced Ukrainians to Scotland. The Scottish Government has provided £4m in financial aid and £3m worth of medical supplies to help provide humanitarian assistance, including in health, water and sanitation, and shelter for those fleeing Ukraine.

Background **ANNEX C**

Previous Engagement with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

- Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met the former First Minister in September 2022. They discussed Scotland's support for Belarus, political prisoners and the war in Ukraine. They also discussed potential for learning opportunities.
- Ms Tsikhanouskaya has created a cabinet-in-exile, the United Transitional Cabinet. In meeting the former FM she enquired about possible opportunities to learn about democratic governance through Scottish Government.

[REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice][REDACTED – S.30(b)(i): free and frank provision of advice]

Libereco Godparenting Scheme

- Partnership for Human Rights (Libereco) are a German-Swiss human rights non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection of human rights in Belarus and Ukraine. They advocate for people who are persecuted because of their political or civic commitment by providing information about human rights violations, supporting victims of war and violence, engaging in intercultural human rights education, and providing humanitarian assistance including psychosocial support.
- In July 2020, a month prior to the Presidential election, *Libereco* launched the #WeStandBYyou campaign which called for solidarity with Belarusians committed to free and fair elections, democratisation of the country, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- As part of this campaign a 'godparenting' scheme was launched. The intention of this scheme is to raise awareness of political prisoners, to stand in solidarity with them and to reassure them that the global community knows they have been imprisoned and have not been forgotten. It also acts as a protection mechanism by raising their profile and indicating to the Belarusian authorities that parliamentarians will take action if the situation of their 'godchild' deteriorates or if they disappear.
- 19 parliamentarians from the House of Commons and the House of Lords (Annex B) and three members of the Scottish Parliament (Willie Rennie, Liberal Democrats, Liam McArthur, Liberal Democrats and Alexander Burnett, Conservative) have already become 'godparents' under the scheme.
- Mr Robertson, Ms McKelvie, Ms Roddick and Mr Gray have also committed to joining the scheme.

Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship

- The Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship is funded by the Scottish Government and is delivered by the University of Dundee in coordination with Amnesty International, Front Line Defenders, Peace Brigades International and other civil society and academic contributors.
- The Fellowship enables human rights defenders in difficult conditions from other countries to spend several months in Scotland, where they can rest but also continue their work, further develop their skills, extend their networks in a place of safety, and continue their vital work.
- Since the Fellowship was established in 2018 we have welcomed 12 Human Rights Defenders from 12 different countries to Scotland.
- In 2022 we were delighted to welcome a Belarusian human rights defender to Scotland as part of our Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship programme.

Politics in Belarus

- Alexander Lukashenko has been president of Belarus since 1994, leading an authoritarian state with a poor human rights record. The fraudulent election of 2020 marked the end of the latest in a series of rapprochements with the West stretching back over many years. Ahead of the elections, the main opposition candidates were detained, and have since received lengthy prison sentences.
- Belarus continues to facilitate Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. It allowed its territory to be used for part of Russia's ground invasion of Ukraine and has allowed Russia to conduct missile and drone strikes against Ukraine from its territory and airspace. Although Russia has withdrawn the majority of its forces from Belarus and no Russian missile or drone strikes against Ukraine have taken place from Belarus since October 2022, the regime nevertheless continues to provide significant logistical support to Russia's military forces.
- Belarus has not committed its forces to combat in Ukraine in support of Russia. Doing so would provide no tactical advantage to Russia and in all likelihood be unpopular with a large part of the Belarusian population and possibly parts of the Belarusian military.
- On 25 February Belarus will hold the first parliamentary elections since the disputed 2020 election and the mass protests that followed. Belarusian authorities have refused to allow any independent election monitors to observe the election.

Actions against Belarus

- The Scottish Government, alongside the UK Government supported the vote to suspend Belarus's co-chairmanship of the European Higher Education Area, until such a time where we feel the issues ongoing within the country do not contradict the ethos of the European Higher Education Area.
- UK sanctions on Belarus are split between designations and measures made in response to the human rights situation, and designations and measures taken

in response to the facilitation by Lukashenko and his regime of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

- To date HMG has sanctioned over 200 Belarusian individuals and entities. Most recently in December 2023, 17 members of the Belarusian judiciary were sanctioned for human rights abuses.

Human rights in Belarus

- Freedom House's 2023 Freedom in the World Report ranks Belarus as 'Not Free' with an overall score of 8 (out of a total of 100).
- The 2020 election is regarded as fraudulent by numerous independent election monitors, and resulted in widespread peaceful protests. The authorities reacted with a brutal crackdown, systematically torturing and using other forms of ill-treatment against those detained during protests.
- In September 2023 a Presidential decree ordered Belarusian consulates to stop issuing new passports. The decree impacts hundreds of thousands of Belarusians living abroad who will now have to return to Belarus for renewal. In particular, those living in exile who are not able to return to Belarus safely.

Biographies **ANNEX D**

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is the leader of the Belarusian democratic movement and Belarusian Human rights activist.

Ms Tsikhanouskaya ran for the Belarusian presidency in 2020 in place of her husband, following his arrest in May 2020. He remains in prison and has been sentenced for 18 years for acts relating to 'mass riots' and 'incitement to social hostility'.

In August 2020, a deeply flawed presidential election took place in Belarus which saw 'Europe's last dictator' Alexander Lukashenko retain power through large-scale manipulation and coercion. Following the fraudulent election, Lukashenko has enacted a regime of severe repression against Belarusians, with over 37,000 arrests in a short period of time.

Independent observers concluded she won the election. Since then, she has lived in exile in Lithuania, meeting leaders and calling for a regime change in Belarus.

Svietlana has previously had meetings with President Biden, Angela Merkel, the UK Prime Minister, President Macron and spoken at the UN and EU. She is a recipient of the Sakharov Prize awarded by the European Parliament. In 2020, Lithuanian President Nauseda and Norwegian MPs nominated her for the Nobel Peace Prize.

9 August 2022 Ms Tsikhanouskaya established a temporary executive body for Belarus, the "United Transitional Cabinet". The cabinet operates in exile and seeks to restore democratic rule in Belarus.

Ms. Tsikhanouskaya grew up in Mikashevichi, a town south of Minsk, the capital. She was previously a teacher and has two children, the elder child was born nearly deaf and she moved her family from Minsk to the southeastern city of Gomel so he could receive special care.

Dzmitryi Halavacz - In October 2023 Dzmitryi Halavacz was sentenced to nine years in prison. He was found guilty, in a closed-door trial, of 'inciting hatred, being a member of an extremist group, discrediting the country and insulting President Lukashenko'.

He is one of three members of the music group, TOR Band. The band was labelled by the State as an extremist group. All three members of the band were arrested October 2022 and are now serving sentences. Dzimitryi's wife has had contact with Libereco.

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]On Behalf Of First Minister
Sent: Friday, February 2, 2024 11:45 AM
To: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Cc: Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>;
Subject: RE: Meeting Note: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 23 January

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION],

Thanks for the meeting briefing/support and the note.

The First Minister is content with the note and actions. Grateful if we can keep the FM apprised of/involved with the next steps.

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Private Secretary to the First Minister
5th Floor | St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG
M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

From: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]
Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2024 4:55 PM
To: First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Emily Mackintosh <Emily.Mackintosh@gov.scot>; John Primrose <John.Primrose@gov.scot>; Scott Wightman <Scott.Wightman@gov.scot>; **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**International Strategic Comms <communicationsinternational@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; Colin McAllister <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>;**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**
Subject: Meeting Note: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 23 January

Hi **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**,

Please find below a note of FM's meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Please let me know if FM is content.

Regarding actions:

- a contact number has been shared with Ms Tsikhanouskaya's team, as requested
- I will meet next week with Ken and Irina to follow up on info sharing on humanitarian organisations

[REDACTED – S.39 Health, Safety and the environment]
Best wishes,

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]

Meeting between First Minister and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Online meeting, 23 January 2023

Attendees
First Minister (FM)
Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (ST)
Dzianis Kuchynski, Adviser to ST
Franak Viačorka, Adviser to ST
Irina McLean, People's Consulate for Belarus in Scotland (IM)
Kenneth McBain, Libereco (KM)
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION], Senior Policy Officer DEXA
[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION], Private Office

[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]
[REDACTED – S.39 Health, Safety and the environment]
Supporting the fight for a democratic Belarus
FM noted that fighting for freedom in Belarus was also an act of fighting for continued freedom in Europe. FM stated it was important to keep raising the issue of human rights abuses in Belarus and that he will consider further how SG can help further raise the issue. ST thanked FM and noted that words of support are helpful. ST continued that practical support would also be welcome, for example through supporting humanitarian organisations.

ST invited IM to speak on humanitarian organisations working to support their cause in Belarus. IM noted that humanitarian charities had largely left Belarus and operated in exile. IM said that financial support to families of political prisoners was a key area for support and there was scope for support through knowledge sharing. FM stated that Scotland had a proud history of supporting international communities, most recently supporting Ukrainian and Afghan refugees. This support is part of Scotland's global outlook and position as a good global citizen. IM advised she will share further information about organisations.

ST also enquired about learning opportunities with Scottish Parliament. ST stated her team is keen to learn the mechanisms of democracy to build a sustainable democratic system in Belarus. FM stated he was open to SG providing further support, where possible, and that it would be useful to understand in which specific areas they wish to learn more. FM then highlighted NGO Beyond Borders Scotland that offers fellowships in peace building to women across the world. FM committed to sharing more information on programmes that Beyond Borders Scotland offer.

Close
ST thanked FM for his time and deep involvement in the campaign. She also noted that she hoped to visit Scotland in future. FM offered ST that it would be a pleasure to meet in Scotland and work further on the pursuit of democratic freedom.

ENDS

[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]Senior Policy Officer – International Relations
International Division DEXA| Scottish Government
Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ | M: **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Question 5 **ANNEX E**

You requested:

"Full cost of Humza Yousaf's trip to London in January and full receipts from the trip, including how much his officials cost?"

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because exemptions under sections 38(1)(b) (Personal Information) and 39(1) (Health, safety and the environment) of FOISA applies to that information.

The full cost of the First Minister's trip to London in January was £6,372.76

An exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (personal information) applies to some of the information requested because it is the personal data of a third party, the names/contact details of individuals, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Schedule 1 to the Data Protection Act 1998. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

An exemption under section 39(1) of FOISA (health, safety and the environment) applies to some of the information you have requested. The Scottish Government does not provide information in relation to the First Minister's security matters. This is because disclosure would, or would be likely to, endanger the physical or mental health or safety of an individual. This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is some public interest in the arrangements for the First Minister's travel, however, this is outweighed by the public interest in the safety of the First Minister.

For your awareness, the Scottish Government routinely publishes the cost of Ministers' domestic and overseas travel and accommodation. Please see: https://www.gov.scot/collections/ministerial-engagements-travel-and-gifts/

Question 6 **ANNEX F**

You requested:

"All minutes and notes from his EU discussions on Tuesday January 30 in London, including a full list of attendees."

In responding to your query, I have made the assumption that the "EU discussions" you ask about refers to the discussion attended by the First Minister, the EU Ambassador to the UK, and Heads of Mission of the EU Member States.

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because an exemption(s) under sections 32(1)(a)(ii) (International relations) and 38 (Personal information) of FOISA applies to that information. The reasons why that exemption(s) applies are explained below.

Exemptions under sections 32(1)(a)(i) and 32(1)(a)(ii) of FOISA (International relations) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially relations between the United Kingdom and the EU and its Member States. The effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between the UK Government and other States and international organisations. If the Scottish Government does not respect this confidence, the UK Government's relations with other States and international organisations and its ability to protect and promote UK interests will be substantially prejudiced.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in ensuring that the UK Government is able to maintain good relations with other States and international organisations, in order to protect and promote UK interests abroad.

An exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (personal information) also applies to a small amount of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, ie the name of an individual, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

EU AMBASSADORS ROUNDTABLE	
Minister	First Minister
Type of engagement	The First Minister was invited as guest of honour by EU Ambassador Serrano to a private roundtable discussion with the Heads of Mission of the 27 EU Member States. Following opening remarks, a facilitated Q+A session took place for approximately 45 minutes. As the meeting was conducted under the Chatham House Rule, no comments have been attributed in the note below.
Date/time	**Tuesday 30th January – 10:30 – 11:45**
Who	Pedro Serrano – EU Ambassador to the UK Heads of Mission of the 27 EU Member States
Key Points	

UK – EU Relations

1. The discussion reflected on the improvement in UK-EU relations since the signing of the Windsor Framework, and which has enabled agreements such as association to Horizon Europe. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]** The Scottish Government's strong and enduring support for Ukraine including those fleeing the conflict was acknowledged.

UK – EU Elections

2. The conversation reflected on the various scenarios in play as we look ahead to the UK General election, including within that the Scottish context. The forthcoming EU elections were discussed **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**

Devolution

3. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**

Scotland's constitutional future

4. It was noted Scotland's constitutional debate is internal to the **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]** The Scottish Government's commitment to a legal and constitutional route to independence was reaffirmed. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**

Expansion of overseas network

5. The prospect of further expansion of Scotland's overseas network was raised including the timeline for the stated commitment of opening a Hub in Warsaw. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**

Energy

6. Renewable Energy cooperation was discussed**[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]** The conversation discussed whether in future there could be closer alignment of Scottish Government-UK Government aspirations on Energy in order to accelerate and maximise the opportunity.

Mobility

Student mobility was discussed, **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**, it was confirmed the Scottish Government is delivering a test-and-learn project in order to re-establish some of the opportunities Erasmus+ provided, at small scale initially. **[REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**

ENDS

Actions	**1. [REDACTED – S. 32(1)(a)(i): INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS]**
Attending Official	**Martin Johnson**, EU Director **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**, Head of UK, EU and International Relations, Scotland House London
Copy List	Permanent Secretary Joe Griffin Scott Wightman Martin Johnson Deputy Director European Relations John Primrose Russell Bain John Webster **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**

Question 7 **ANNEX G**

You requested:

“Who was the final person who signed off on the budget 2024/25?”

The overall responsibility for the Scottish Budget is held by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (DFM). The DFM agrees the funding allocation for each individual portfolio at level 1, which is then agreed by Cabinet as a whole.

Each Cabinet Secretary signs off the budget for their portfolio across levels 2, 3 and 4, before this is incorporated into the Scottish Budget document.

You can find further detail on the 2024-25 Scottish Budget here - Scottish Budget: 2024 to 2025 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Question 8 **ANNEX H**

You requested:

"All minutes and notes taken at the climate change summit on February 1, including a full list of attendees?"

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance we are unable to provide some of the information you have requested because an exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (Personal Information) applies to a small amount of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, ie the name of an official. Disclosing this information would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

FM Cross-Party Scottish Leaders Roundtable – 1 February 2024 – Meeting Summary

Summary Note:

The First Minister (FM) and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (MM) met with Scottish Party Leaders at Bute House 1 February 2024.

The discussion at this meeting was very productive and the group were given a presentation from Chris Stark (CS) on analysis the CCC have provided on the potential Scottish gap. Furthermore, Scottish Party Leaders highlighted what they felt were the biggest challenges and opportunities in reaching net zero by 2045.

Issues discussed included:

- FM thanked all attendees for being available for the meeting and highlighted the Scottish Government's intention to remain committed to the ambition of being net zero by 20245.
- MM added that net zero ambition can be paired with economic growth – highlighting the fact that we have reduced our carbon emissions on the 1990 baseline by 50%, whilst also seeing the economy grow by 57%.
- CS delivered a presentation where he highlighted global carbon emissions over the past 800-thousand years. CS added that we are now entering a plateau period with carbon emissions, as agreed at COP28.
- CS also portrayed carbon emissions in Scotland by sector and the make-up of each of these – noting that whilst a number of the sectors were sloping downwards in their carbon emission trajectory, we were not seeing any rapid decline.
- CS also presented a projected pathway the CCC have set out, on how Scotland can reach net zero by 2045, but stressed that policies to do so would need to be impactful and done in a way that is just and fair.

- FM handed over to Party Leaders to deliver short interventions on the challenges and opportunities in reaching net zero by 2045.
- ACH highlighted the 3 biggest emitting sectors: Buildings; Industry; and Transport and stressed that progress on each of these sectors has been relatively slow.
- ACH demonstrated some Scottish Liberal Democrat Party pledges, including an emergency insulation programme and free retrofitting of heat pumps for low-income households. Furthermore, there is a requirement for transport to be more fair – improved availability of and more environmentally friendly buses and trains.
- AS expressed that there was a shared ambition within the oil and gas sector for a just transition and that there was a requirement for partnership between businesses, industry and cross-government.
- AS also expressed that public perception is very important and that we need to convince the public of higher paying jobs, better working conditions and a cheaper cost of living. In addition, AS also stressed that Electric Vehicle (EV) charging units need to be more affordable and so do low carbon vehicles.
- DR offered that insulating homes is a very easy solution to reducing carbon emissions and this has been the policy over preceding years. DR expressed some concern over how the framing of climate change lands with the general public has only gone so far and the particular issues experienced in the planning sector, which has been prone to delays of projects.
- DR raised education and green skills, highlighting a requirement to ensure that we are identifying skills which will be required in the coming years and ensuring that we have enough skilled labour to do the jobs required.
- LS emphasised that strengthening the economy is the right signal for the public. LS added that the 2045 target is stretching and that policy areas such as industry, agriculture, buildings and transport require major policies to decarbonise. It is important that at the heart of such policies is a shared ambition and responsibility, which ensures a transition that is just and fair.
- CS offered some closing remarks, adding that it was important that any arguments we make regarding climate change need to have co-benefits to get wider public buy-in e.g. increased employment.
- MM added that Scotland has a role in the world to be a leader when it comes to climate change and there is a need to be bold in achieving our target.
- FM closed the meeting.

Attendees:

- Humza Yousaf MSP, First Minister (HY)
- Mairi McAllan MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (MM)
- Douglas Ross MSP, Party Leader, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (DR)
- Elliot Roy, Political Director, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (ES)
- Anas Sarwar MSP, Party Leader, Scottish Labour (AS)
- Rosanna Dobbin, Head of Policy, Scottish Labour (RD)
- Alex Cole-Hamilton, Party Leader, Scottish Liberal Democrats (ACH)
- James Parry, Director of Parliamentary Operations for the Scottish Liberal Democrats (JP)
- Lorna Slater MSP, Party Co-Leader, Scottish Green Party (LS)
- Patrick Harvie MSP, Party Co-Leader, Scottish Green Party (PH)
- Margaret Hall, Scottish Green Party (MH)
- Chris Stark, Chief Executive, Climate Change Committee (CS)
- Colin McAllister, Special Advisor, Scottish Government (CM)
- Leanne Dobson, Special Advisor, Scottish Government (LD)
- Kersti Berge, Director, Directorate for Energy and Climate Change (KB)
- Phil Raines, DD, Domestic Climate Change Division (PR)
- **[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**, Domestic Climate Change Division (**[REDACTED – S.38 PERSONAL INFORMATION]**)