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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Cabinet Office
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18 March 2020

Dear Michael

I note that it was confirmed yesterday that there will be no negotiating round this week on the future relationship between the UK and the EU and that consideration is being given to other ways to establish contact and exchange during the Coronavirus crisis.

Because of the crisis, the Scottish Government has paused work on preparing for an independence referendum this year. We have also written to the Electoral Commission to make clear we do not expect it to undertake testing of a referendum question until public health circumstances permit such activity (while also urging the commission to reject the UK Government's objections to testing). That will allow us to focus all available resource on current and future demands in what is an unprecedented set of circumstances. It follows from this that a referendum will not take place this year.

We would now strongly suggest to the UK Government that the time has come for an equivalent action by you with regard to the Brexit process, and would ask you to institute a pause to EU/UK negotiations for at least six months.

It would seem impossible for business and others to cope with the enormous challenge of Coronavirus while at the same time preparing for a completely new relationship with the EU in nine months' time.

A pause is also necessary given the inevitable lack of parliamentary and public scrutiny of the negotiations and their progress over that period, when all attention and effort will be focused on our collective actions to tackle and defeat the Coronavirus .

It will also be difficult for the JMC (EN) to meet during that time and therefore there will be no opportunity for the UK's four governments to "provide oversight of the negotiations" as set out in the its terms of reference.

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The UK and the Scottish Governments have worked closely together during this unprecedented time to tackle the crisis and I look forward to this continuing over the coming months.

I would be happy to discuss this with you in more detail and I am copying my letter to the First Minister & deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, the First Minister and Counsel General of Wales, the First Minister of Scotland and to Bruce Crawford MSP, the convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Constitution Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A large, bold, black 'PD' inside a dashed rectangular box, indicating a placeholder for a signature or stamp.

MICHAEL RUSSELL MSP

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