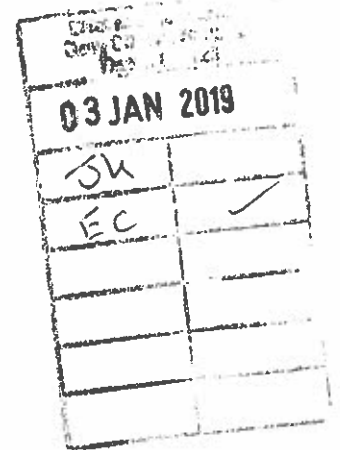




Mr. John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry and Strabane District Council
98 Strand Road
Co Derry
BT48 7NN



21 December 2018

Our Ref: IUKA180794

Dear Mr. Kelpie,

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Simon Coveney TD, has asked me to thank you for your correspondence of 4 December 2018 to the Taoiseach regarding a motion passed by Derry City and Strabane District Council, which was forward for the Tánaiste's attention.

The Tánaiste has me to state in reply that the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority the Government. The Government fully endorses the legitimate aspiration to unity expressed in Article 3 of the Constitution, as amended by the people in 1998.

The principle of consent and the possibility of change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland are fundamental elements of the Good Friday Agreement, endorsed by the people of this island North and South. The Agreement states that "it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland".

Under the Agreement, the two Governments "recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Britain or a sovereign united Ireland". And should such a choice be made in the future, it will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.

The holding of a referendum in this jurisdiction is connected with the calling of a border poll, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. This would occur when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland considers it likely that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland.

At present, the Government does not believe it likely that such a border poll in the near future would result in a decision on the part of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland in favour of constitutional change. In these circumstances, it is the Government's clear view that such a poll would only increase uncertainty and division at an already difficult and sensitive time. The Government has been very clear that it does not see the UK exit from the European Union as a pretext or an opportunity for pursuing the holding of a border poll in Northern Ireland, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

The immediate priorities for the Government are to secure the functioning of the devolved power-sharing institutions and the North South Ministerial Council, which are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, and to ensure the protection of the Agreement in all its parts and the gains and benefits of the Peace Process, through the ongoing Article 50 negotiation between the European Union and the UK, which are at a critical point.

Yours sincerely,



Clare Brosnan
Private Secretary