

Introduction

Abbot Luser, government ministers, excellences, ladies and gentlemen, It is my very great pleasure to address you in such a stunning location in this grand Abbey.

I speak to you only three days after the General Election in the United Kingdom and for the politicians amongst us, there is much to commend in travelling to a monastery for peace, reflection and perspective after a General Election.

Whilst I come from a country on the north west periphery of Europe in geographical terms, we care very much about the EU's and Europe's future from the North East to the South West.

I am Minister in the Scottish Government for External Affairs – it is for the UK as a Member State in the EU to negotiate with its EU partners but we do have a voice and we can have influence, particularly now there is a hung Parliament in the UK.

My party, the Scottish National Party, won the election in Scotland winning 35 out of 59 seats after 10 years in Government without media or press support. We continue to win the popular vote. We are popular not populist. We are pro-European, progressive and inclusive.

The issue of subsidiarity has been a recurring theme of this conference. In Scotland, we have had devolved powers for the last 18 years over a range of areas from justice, agriculture, fisheries, energy, culture and health. And we have show in these areas that we are capable of delivering for our people.

There is perhaps a big lesson for us in the UK General Election vote – that last week's surge in support for the Labour Party, particularly in England, has in part been put down to over 70% of 18-24 year olds turning out to vote (a half a million registered in the final week) – the same age group who voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU but didn't vote in the same numbers. They voted for big-picture politics, for a vision of the country they want to be part of.

Yesterday we heard of the importance of solidarity, subsidiarity, for the value and emotion of hope in internationalism and the European ideal. Our young people are natural Europeans. Their support for the EU is not because of why it came into being in the first place, however vitally important that is. It is because of what it is now and what it means for their lives and futures.

My generation were not born EU citizens but became citizens through constitutional change. Today's young people were born EU citizens and have always seen it as their entitlement. They are natural not hesitant Europeans. They are essential European citizens and we all have much to learn from their voice, perspective and leadership.

A Europe Closer to its Citizens

The topic of the conference – a “Europe Closer to its Citizens” – is reflective of challenges the EU faces but also of the potential for change. The UK as a whole voted last June to leave the EU, but Scotland voted overwhelmingly to stay, with 62% voting to remain as EU citizens.

I know that in the over 100 engagements the Scottish Government has had with EU Member States since last summer's referendum there has been a mixture of sadness and disbelief, concern for the future, and a resolve for the EU to carry on – to deal with Brexit efficiently but to focus on developing the EU for the future.

But there has also been an acknowledgement from some that the Brexit vote is an alert call for the rest of the EU to change, become more relevant, and connected with the citizens it serves.

Frankly I am confident that the EU will continue to project its fundamental values - values that align with Scotland's: respect for human dignity, for freedom, for democracy and the rule of law. Election results in the Netherlands and France emboldened my view that the future, though challenging, is positive.

Scotland in Europe: why we have something to say

Scotland has been a European nation for over 1000 years, 300 of those as part of the UK. Throughout our history, we have traded with our European neighbours and established political and diplomatic links.

Eleanor of Scotland, daughter of King James 1 of Scotland, was an early example of the strong relationship between Scotland and Austria. Between 1448 and 1449 she married the Archduke of Further Austria and served repeatedly as regent for her husband, incidentally becoming an early champion of women's rights.

I am delighted to hear that the issue of women's rights are alive and well in Lower Austria. Our respective Governments have 50% female representation at Cabinet.

In the 1700s – during the famous “Enlightenment period”, Scotland made a significant contribution to the intellectual and economic development of Europe. *We promoted rational debate and democracy.*

Our Parliament, which was vested on the 1st of July 1999, is predicated upon the very existence of the EU, and importantly EU law underpins and shapes what the Parliament does. *Our Parliament was also born into the EU.*

We have always been an outward-facing pro-European country and remain so today.

My Government was deeply shocked by the UK wide decision to leave the EU but I am proud Scots voted by 62% to 38% to remain. For the avoidance of doubt, the Scottish Government remains committed to Scotland's membership of the EU: that is our aim.

We want to be EU citizens and to be closer to Europe as a whole compared to the rest of the UK. We want the UK to do well in the negotiations but we know that any Brexit deal will not be as good a deal as we have as a Member State. From Day 1, we have argued for the position of EU nationals living in the UK to be made secure. Mutual respect of our citizens as individuals and human beings must be established quickly in Brexit negotiations.

In the spirit of compromise The Scottish Government worked hard to develop firm detailed proposals that would have allowed Scotland and the UK to continue with membership of the European Single Market thereby maintaining our place in Europe, even if the UK left the EU.

The UK now has a hung Parliament and we will re-double our efforts to work with other parties with the aim of keeping the UK (*and if necessary Scotland alone*) in the Single Market. Theresa May is negotiating with the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland to try and secure an agreement that will allow her to govern. Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU. Although the DUP wants to leave, this coalition may result in a softening of the UK position on Brexit.

You will be aware that the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland is a key issue in the forthcoming negotiations. The UK Government has been neutral in dealing with the question of power sharing in Northern Ireland up till now. If there is to be a relationship between the Conservative Party and the DUP, that could lead some to question that neutrality going forward. That is simply something to be aware of as the process develops.

Whatever happens, we expect the UK to fully involve Scotland, as well as the Welsh and Northern Irish administrations in the negotiations – recognising that the UK is a multinational state.

There is deep concern in Scotland about the economic impact of a hard Brexit which would see the UK leave the EU Single Market and fall back on WTO regulations. Before the General Election, the possibility of no deal was very real. We now may, and I repeat may, have a window of possibility of persuading the UK to pursue a softer Brexit.

Edinburgh International Festival

Turning to the positive. This summer Scotland will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the birth of the Edinburgh International Festival - the world's biggest.

The idea of a Festival to enrich the cultural life of Scotland, Britain and Europe took form in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Edinburgh Festival had a remit to “provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit” after war and conflict. The Festival owes its existence to the remarkable foresight of Sir Rudolf Bing, a Vienna born Austrian Jew, who was the General Manager of Glyndebourne Opera Festival. He developed the concept of the

Festival during a wartime tour of a small-scale Glyndebourne production of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Sir Rudolf Bing, who will be honoured at this year's festival in Edinburgh, was ahead of his time in recognising the role of culture in bringing fractured countries together – we owe him a great debt of gratitude. And culture can do so much to build bridges of understanding and connection and solidarity.

What has the EU Delivered

Perhaps because the UK is sadly leaving the EU, there is greater examination of what it does – after the UK Brexit vote, the most searched question on Google was “What is the EU”?

The EU has been much more than a simple trading block. It has improved our lives in many ways. It has provided life changing opportunities for students and researchers and boosted innovation, it has led to an increase in the social protections enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights ensuring a common minimum standard across the EU.

EU law prevents exploitation of workers, protects employees' rights to maternity, parental leave and paid leave and ensures they work in a safe environment. The ability to travel, work, study, fall in love, marry and set up home and bring up a family in another EU country is a fundamental right the natural EU essential citizen, the young, embrace so well.

The EU's work on the “big issues” of tackling climate change and migration will we know become more pressing and we need to set out those issues and understand the opportunities that focussing on them presents. We need only look at the extent of the problems in North Africa in the coming decades where mutual self-interest dictates that we act together to deal with those.

Challenges facing the EU.

We as a Government have done a great deal of thinking on how to make the EU work better for its citizens. Some of that work was driven by the Balance of Competencies Review that the UK Government instigated in 2013 which interestingly came to the conclusion that there was no evidence that excessive powers had been concentrated in Brussels.

There is no doubt that the EU of today faces a different set of challenges to those that Europe was facing 60 years ago. The EU's share of the world's population and GDP is declining, the global threats it faces are multiplying - from cyber-attacks on its infrastructure to an increase in the threat from terrorism.

In Scotland and across the UK, we remain numbed by the shocking attacks in London and Manchester in the last few weeks which have led to so much loss of life and injury, including amongst children and the young. *Our response was one of unity using culture as bridge to bind us through the Ariana Grande benefit concert – demonstrating a commitment to the freedoms we hold so dear.* But tragically ours is an experience that other countries around the EU and beyond have also shared. Terrorism knows no boundaries. It is essential that there is increasing cooperation across Europe to respond to it.

The EU also continues to deal with the legacy of the economic crisis, the challenges around decarbonising our economies and responding to the challenges of an ageing population.

Handling the complex challenges of mass migration to the EU fuelled by an increasingly violent and unstable world won't be solved overnight - but it certainly won't be solved without cross border collaboration.

The European Commission's White Paper on the future of the EU published in March 2017, offers a welcome catalyst to orientating a debate on what kind of EU we want. There will be different views. The Scottish Government is clear that we see the EU as much more than a trading bloc, offering valuable social protections and driving collective action to solve pressing global problems. The Abbot of Gottweig spoke yesterday of the "Common Weal"- it is a very important and welcome concept in Scottish society and relevant to today's debate about the EU's future.

The Scottish Government is determined to ensure that Brexit, for all its importance, is not allowed to dominate our international relations. Whatever these negotiations produce, we all have important economic, cultural and personal links which must and will be maintained and enhanced.

The Young

In all this we need to remember who all this work is ultimately for. I feel a particular obligation to young people who will be dealing with the consequences of Brexit the longest. In the UK around 72% of the 18 -24 year olds who voted in last year's referendum on EU membership, voted to remain. 60% of people aged 65 and over voted to leave.

Whilst I respect the views of all, we must place great weight on the needs of the future generations as we consider what kind of EU we want for the future. Young people have made prolific use of the flexibility to travel, work, study and live in the 28 countries of the EU, they are the key to our future success and prosperity and we must ensure their needs are not forgotten as we work together to develop the EU as an engine of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. For them, the EU is natural – it is not some artificial, bureaucratic construct – they are natural, not reluctant, citizens.

Conclusion

In closing, whatever the future holds, Scotland as an open, vibrant and outward looking country wants to stay connected with our European partners as the debate about the future shape of the Europe gathers pace.

On Brexit, we will seek to continue to engage with member states and sub –states. That will not be for the purpose of trying to engage in a covert Brexit negotiation. The negotiation is rightly for the UK to conduct with the 27 Member States. But it will be to ensure that our pro-EU stance and constitutional journey towards independence continues to be understood.

And just as importantly, if not more so, we will seek to engage our European partners on the pressing problems of the day promoting policy and knowledge exchange, cooperation and collaborative ventures that will show people what the EU can deliver.

It is vital that future cooperation and relationships are not defined solely through the lens of the Brexit talks. There are simply too many other issues at stake. On climate change, youth employment, innovation and creativity, the EU must be a progressive social force for good and not simply a traditional economic force of self-interest.

That will bring the EU closer to its citizens and reflect the desires of its citizens, particularly the young.

*So from the country of enlightenment we see there is great advantage and mutual self interest
in pooling and sharing sovereignty for the greater good and that is why we want our own
people to have the opportunity to choose their future.*

The vision of Alois Mock for the EU should be remembered, honoured and pursued.