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THE PRIME MINISTER

14 January 2019

Dear Susal

Thank you for your recent letters of 10 December 2018 and 7 January 2019. I also welcomed the opportunity to give evidence to the Liaison Committee on 29 November and I hope the Committee found the session similarly useful.

You have asked about the extending of Article 50, in order to renegotiate. As you note in the quote you have provided from Donald Tusk, the EU has been clear that the agreement we have is the best and only deal on offer and that they are not open to renegotiating it. I have also been consistently clear that I think this is a good deal for the UK. It delivers the result of the referendum, secures the rights of more than three million EU citizens living in the UK and around one million UK nationals living in the EU, sets out the terms of a time-limited implementation period, and frames our ambitious future relationship. It is a deal that realises the benefits of Brexit and will allow us to focus on the big domestic issues that face our country.

In my comments on 29 November, I was seeking to explain to those who have suggested that we should renegotiate the deal that this would require the extension of Article 50, because a renegotiation could not be completed in time to allow us to pass the necessary legislation by 29 March 2019. Furthermore, extending Article 50 for any reason would ultimately risk reopening the deal, as there are many parties who would seek to use the opportunity to try to renegotiate parts of the deal. As I have told the House, it would not simply be a question of what the UK wanted to change: since the extension of Article 50 requires unanimous agreement from Member States, there is the risk that individual countries would seek to re-open elements of the agreement, for example on fisheries or Gibraltar. I was therefore seeking to explain why I think renegotiation, even if possible, would be undesirable.

You also asked about my next appearance at the Liaison Committee. As you will know, I have consistently made myself available for questioning in the House – I have, for example, made 8 oral statements on Brexit since October - and I remain committed to appearing before the Committee three times a year. I will consider your request for an appearance after the Meaningful Vote and my office will be in touch with yours.

Finally, you asked about the role of Parliament in the next phase of the negotiations. As I said during the debate on 4 December, we want to ensure that Parliament has an enhanced opportunity to scrutinise and provide input as we develop the negotiating mandate for the future relationship, building on the political declaration. There are a number of ways we could do so, including considering the configuration and responsibilities of select committees, how frequently Parliament is updated and on what issues. Of course, Parliament will have its own views on how it would like to be engaged in the next phase and it would be helpful to have the Liaison Committee's input to this. We will want to establish the procedures quickly so that we are in a position to move rapidly in the negotiations in order to get the future relationship agreed and in place by the end of the Implementation Period.

I would like to thank you, once again, for writing and I hope this information is helpful.

Yours ever



Dr Sarah Wollaston MP