

## Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-712

Petition title: A Welsh Government Department for Europe Would Ensure a Clear, Strategic and Accountable Voice for Wales in Ongoing Negotiations

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create a Department for Europe as a matter of urgency, tasked with understanding and developing a strategy for Wales' continued engagement with the EU and our future relationship with the European partners.

Since the Brexit referendum the UK Government's response has been slow and ambiguous – A Cabinet office unit for Brexit was initially proposed then abandoned to be replaced with the new post of “Minister for Brexit”, a role seemingly bereft of clear objectives, and led by an MP who has spent the last 20 years on the back benches.

In Wales the Welsh Government response has been muted to say the least and it is time now that Wales itself took action so that negotiations between the UK and the rest of the EU work smoothly and that Wales – a net beneficiary of EU membership – has a decisive role in shaping our future relationship with the EU. As things currently stand, England and Scotland dominate all negotiations with the wider EU and without a concerted strategic plan of action from the Welsh government, this situation is likely to continue.

This Department should have a strong Cabinet Secretary with experience of working in Europe who can work across all departments. The Secretary should be supported by a cross-party committee to scrutinise all areas of current engagement and to help devise what our future relationship with the EU should look like. This committee should in turn be advised by a group of external expert advisors brought in from legal, economic, business, agricultural, cultural, and academic sectors.

A Welsh Government Department for Europe would ensure a clear, strategic and accountable voice for Wales in ongoing negotiations. We also need a strong voice in Europe to make sure that we continue to benefit and contribute to the areas we are already involved

in and to develop relationships with the EU in sectors that we are not currently fully engaged with post Brexit.

## Background

The Welsh Government's response to Brexit has been summarised in a letter from the First Minister to the Committee, and is referenced below. The UK and Scottish Government have both appointed ministers with specific responsibility for the implications of the UK's vote to leave the EU.

The UK Government has appointed David Davis MP as Secretary of State for Exiting the EU. David Davis MP is the Minister for the 'Brexit' department in Whitehall: [Department for Exiting the European Union](#).

The Scottish Government has [recently announced](#) the appointment of Michael Russell MSP as Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe.

The Northern Ireland Executive has not appointed a Minister with specific responsibility for this area.

## Welsh Government action

The First Minister has written to the Committee responding to the petition. Whilst outlining the Welsh Government's overall response to the vote to leave the EU, he notes that:

I have established a Cabinet Sub-Committee specifically to focus on European Transition, which is supported by a European Transition Officials Group comprised of senior officials with a particularly strong direct involvement in this work. These are helping to shape the Welsh Government's initial response to the result of the EU referendum.

I have also established a new team to co-ordinate the Welsh Government's work and negotiating strategy, which will work closely with the Welsh Government Offices in London and Brussels.

Externally, we are setting up a European Advisory Group to advise the Welsh Government on challenges and potential opportunities for Wales arising from the UK's decision to leave the European Union. The Group will first meet later this month.

## National Assembly for Wales action

The [External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee](#) is conducting work on examining the implications for Wales of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. This work involves ensuring that Welsh interests are safeguarded during the withdrawal process, in any new relationship with the European Union and in the intra-UK post-withdrawal arrangements for relevant policy, finance and legislation.

The Committee held one initial evidence session with the First Minister on [12 September 2016](#), and will hold a further evidence session with him on 7 November 2016.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.