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SCOTLAND CAN HELP SHAPE A NEW EUROPE -
DONALD DEWAR

Scotland can look forward to shaping the new Europe as a number of levels as part of a large and influential member state, the Rt Hon Donald Dewar MP, Secretary of State for Scotland said today.

Delivering a St Andrews Day Lecture at Scotland Europa's headquarters in Brussels the Secretary of State said that the Government's proposals for devolution would bring Scotland even more firmly into the European mainstream. He said that Government's in Europe have increasingly seen the advantage of devolving powers to regional and local governments.

“Indeed I believe the experience of our European neighbours shows that countries which have decentralised systems of Government can be economically successful, influential on the foreign stage, and a constructive member of the European Union. The role of the Member State can be complemented by the role of strong regions. European experience shows that influence within the EU begins well before the process of formal negotiations between member states; and operates through many more channels than the formal Community and inter-governmental processes. The message is that decentralised governments engage at different levels with the EU; and Scotland will be able to play its part in the less formal discussions with the institutions of the EU and interests within the other member states.

“To this end, I and my Ministerial colleagues have already had discussions with our counterparts in several of the German lander and in the Spanish regions such as Catalonia, to understand better how they see their future role. Most recently, I had very interesting discussion with the President of Catalonia, the Right Honourable Jordi Pujol. He will be returning to some of these issues in a lecture which he is to give in Scotland shortly; and I have accepted an invitation to visit Catalonia. Meanwhile my

colleague Henry McLeish has recently paid a visit to Bavaria. These direct links at regional government level can make a useful contribution to the development of policy.

“It may be of interest if I summarise the key messages which we take from our contacts with the German *lander* and Spanish autonomous regions.

“First and foremost they told us unambiguously that the relationships with their federal governments work well and harmoniously in relation to EU matters. They made clear that there is no secret to this. The relationships work because they have to work. The only alternative is for the interests of both the federal and regional governments to suffer. Therefore they find a set of arrangements that work for both levels of government. Those arrangements evolve over time. They are not overly formalised and they are not hedged round with sanctions. The imperative provided by common interest is all the underpinning they need.

“The second lesson they shared with us is that good working relationships require regional government to be very professional in their handling of EU matters. It is in the interests of both the federal government and the regional government that officials of the regional government are

sufficiently well informed about EU issues to be able to participate effectively in internal discussion. Far from resenting the capacity of regional governments, as developed for example through representative offices here in Brussels, federal governments have come to appreciate their value in improving regional governments' ability to engage in internal discussion.

“The third lesson was that the impact of regional governments is greatest at the beginning of consideration of EU business rather than the end. In other words, the influence of regional governments is greatest in relation to the member state's position rather than in the final negotiations to balance the positions of the 15 member states. This underlines the importance of our White Paper commitment that “the Scottish Executive will be involved as closely as possible in UK decision making on Europe”.

“That is not to say that the German lander did not congratulate the United Kingdom government on its wisdom in making clear that in appropriate cases ministers of the Scottish Executive could speak for the UK. They pointed out that it had been a key objective for them, which it had taken them considerable effort to achieve.

“The fourth lesson was that the key to delivering the benefits of the second and third lessons is a good early information flow to officials of regional governments about proposals on which member states will have to take positions. We received excellent advice about what this means in practice. It involves complementary roles for national permanent representations and regional government representative offices. National permanent representations have a vital role to play in ensuring that regional governments get the same flow of information as departments of national governments. But that is a huge volume of material. As one of our German contacts said, the cat could die from too much cream. The role of regional government’s representative offices is to select key information and get it straight to the desk of the right colleague based back in the region. Although representative offices have many functions they left us in no doubt that this was the most important. All our contacts made clear to us that, for this and several other reasons, they viewed effective regional government and an effective representative office in Brussels as 2 sides of a single coin.

“Finally, all of our contacts recognised that it is inevitable that, from time to time, regional and national

governments will disagree. They have extensive experience of the fact that sometimes regional and national governments are under different political control. I think it is fair to say that they found the tendency in the UK for some people to be preoccupied with that scenario as an indication that we are only just starting out on the path to regional government. From the standpoint of their experience they regard it as a healthy plurality. Disagreements benefit from political debate. Again they emphasised that national and regional governments have a shared interest in resolving those disagreements, whether on EU matters or domestic policy.

“But the essential strength comes from a successful role as a devolved government within a larger member state. This is not a step to separation. Secession has not proved attractive in any other EU member state. As a part of a large and influential member state, Scotland can look forward to shaping the new Europe at a number of levels.

“And indeed, since the Government came to office last May, we have taken positive steps to reassert the United Kingdom’s place at the centre of European affairs. After devolution, relations with the European Union will remain

the responsibility of the UK Government, as I have explained. But it is the Government's intention that Scottish Ministers will be involved as closely as possible in UK decision-making on Europe. With the strong voice of a large Member State, we can influence the debate and direction of the EU. The Government are already pressing for the completion of the Single Market, which allows us to compete more effectively in Europe. It is a mark of our confidence in our ability to compete on equal terms. We are seeking to improve our competitiveness to enable us to compete with the other major economies in what is an increasingly global market."

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