Hello again, and welcome to my latest general newsletter. Parliament is back in session, we’ve successfully finished our first plenary in Strasbourg, and I’ve spent the summer travelling around the country talking about the implications of Brexit.

There’s a lot of confusion out there, which is why I’ve been producing my weekly Scotland and EU updates. I’ve had a few people asking if they can forward them to their friends and family, and the answer is a resounding yes! We live in uncertain times, and the more we arm ourselves with facts, the better off we’ll all be.

Just last week, I wrote to UK Brexit Minister David Davis for clarification on what – if any – arrangements have been made to protect Scotland’s agriculture industry. Currently 38% of all UK lamb is exported to the EU and it has been reported that this could face tariffs as high as 40% under WTO rules.

Mr Davis has admitted that there is a possibility that the UK may find itself outside of the EU with no trade deal. He has previously been rebuked by Downing Street for declaring it was “improbable” that the UK would remain in the single market.

The sheer arrogance of the Leave campaign is matched only by their incompetence. When the European Parliament’s chief Brexit negotiator, Guy Verhofstadt, made it very clear that there would be no Single Market membership without freedom of movement, Mr Davis simply shrugged and said such a comment “is not new”.

Where is the contingency plan? What will he do to protect Scotland’s agricultural export industry?

I’ve written to him seeking urgent clarification on his comments in light of the potentially high WTO tariffs, and will continue to monitor the situation closely. Clearly, if such high tariffs were imposed they would be devastating for Scotland’s farmers.

Scotland voted to Remain, and I believe the European question may be the key to unlock Scottish independence. I’m still your man in Europe for the foreseeable future, and I’ll be doing all I can to protect your interests. That’s one of the reasons I’m standing for Depute Leader of the SNP – but that’s a conversation for another day! Suffice to say, you can read more about my ideas for change at alyn4depute.eu.

As always, keep in touch at the usual address alyn.smith@europarl.europa.eu or come and say hello when you see me out and about. Always good to put a face to a name!

Yours aye,
As an honorary member of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) I welcomed outgoing BVA President Sean Wensley’s comments on Scotland’s leadership in many areas of animal welfare, and echo his warning that Brexit may put this progress at risk.

During the BVA’s annual Scottish Dinner this month, President Wensley agreed that “A key objective post Brexit must be that the UK does not slip in its world leading outlook and outputs on animal welfare”.

As honorary Vice President of the Scottish SPCA I’ve seen Scotland do some fantastic work in the field of animal welfare, and I’m proud to see us recognised for having done so. From introducing a Bill to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses, to leading the way on the ban on tail docking, Scotland has shown its commitment to the wellbeing of animals.

These hard-won rights must not be allowed to slip away with Brexit, and I look forward to my upcoming meeting with the incoming BVA President Gudrun Ravetz to discuss how we should move forward.

Scotland can be the success story the EU needs

I believe we are at an existential moment for the EU, and if those of us in favour of internationalism and co-operation do not argue for it in principle and in practice we might lose it altogether.

I was struck by Guy Verhofstadt’s point that those who oppose the EU and offer false solutions are always talking about walls and fences. The challenges we face are bigger than any one country, bigger than Germany, bigger than France, bigger than the UK, and indeed bigger than an independent Scotland.

That is why we need to work together, and why it is all the more important that we in Scotland remain engaged and informed as whatever Brexit is moves forward. We are also not without arms in the discussion, at a time when the EU needs a good news story Scotland could be it.

Scotland will not be silent within this process, and where Prime Minister May has committed herself to ‘a UK approach’ we will engage with that in good faith. But we will also be clear what is in Scotland’s interests, and vocal in defending them.

Meantime, I am concentrating on keeping the doors in Brussels and across member states open to us, and am heartened with the response we are receiving.
According to UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, there was no proof the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen was in “clear breach” of international humanitarian law.

You may remember that I managed to win a clear majority of the European Parliament on a call, made last February, for an EU-wide embargo on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, precisely because of the evident breach of international humanitarian law.

So I am shocked to read UK Foreign Secretary made such statements despite the mountain of evidence at hand. Saudi airstrikes have destroyed schools, hospitals, water cisterns, world heritage sites, even weddings and refugee camps. I have seen evidence of UK weapons systems and missiles used to target non-military, purely civilian targets in Yemen this year and the last, thanks to the works of CAAT the Coalition Against Armed Trade, Saferworld UK but also Amnesty and Human Rights Watch.

Instead of denying the obvious, the UK should listen to civil society and follow Sweden’s highly acclaimed decision to suspend its arms trade with Saudi Arabia as long as basic human rights are not respected on the other end. I have myself grown up in Saudi Arabia and I am aware of how divided the Saudis are on a war they are the first ones to denounce as being extremely destructive.

Again, the EU position on arms sales is clear: Member States – amongst them the UK and France – should immediately suspend arms licences because the Saudis are clearly violating international humanitarian law. In other words civilians are being bombed indiscriminately.

On Boris Johnson’s case over denial of war crimes in Yemen

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Time to tackle revolving-door lobbyists!

As you’ll likely already know, Jose Manuel Barroso, a former President of the European Commission, is currently Brexit advisor for Goldman Sachs International – the bank’s UK and European operations. His appointment sparked anger amongst MEPs, who have slammed the potential conflict of interest.

I’m now co-signatory to a Written Declaration asking the European Commission to bring the Barroso case to the European Court of Justice and to monitor the tasks carried out by Barroso on behalf of Goldman Sachs involving dealings with European institutions.

Mr Barroso was a particularly poor Commission President, in every sense except financially!

For a former President of the Commission – with all his diplomatic and political contacts and insider knowledge – going off to work for a bank that is desperately trying to protect itself from the Brexit fallout is a poor show, and I suspect in breach of the restrictions on former officials.

In the same way as the actions of Tony Blair and now who knows, perhaps David Cameron too, bring politics into disrepute, so must Mr Barroso be reminded he is accountable, and if found in breach can lose his not inconsiderable pension.

I welcome the decision taken by the European Commission’s current President, Mr. Juncker, to launch an investigation and refer his case to an EU ethics panel. Transparency international has rightfully stressed the minutes and recommendations of this meeting need to be made public as soon as possible, and I fully support this call for transparency.

The past year hasn’t just cleared the political chessboard; it’s kicked it out of the window. We MEPs are willing to bring a Barroso case to the European Court of Justice if he doesn’t stand down. That’s how serious Parliament is about restoring faith in our democracy.
FIFA will convene on October 13 and is expected to address recent accusations that it does not apply its rules fairly. While Russia was compelled to ban Crimean football teams from its league as it illegally occupies Crimea, Israel has five official teams from settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Last week the first game of the season in a settlement was played.

In an unprecedented move, I've initiated a successful cross-party appeal to FIFA, signed by 66 Members of the European Parliament, from Scotland's SNP to Spanish conservatives, German Social Democrats, French greens and Dutch liberals, to put football ahead of politics and respect the rules.

Let me be clear - I am not asking FIFA to suspend Israel. We just want FIFA to apply the rules. Both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to play football. However, allowing Israel to use football as an instrument of territorial expansion in the West Bank politicises football - and this is not acceptable. The five settlement football teams should relocate within Israel’s internationally-recognised borders, in line with the EU and UN positions.

I see a clear case for action by FIFA and welcome its new emphasis on the respect of human rights. My call is a joint one supported by dozens of leading politicians across Europe, but also committed supporters of peace in Israel.

I am looking forward to FIFA’s answer. The settlement clubs should be excluded from Israel's football league just like Crimea's football teams cannot play in Russia's league. All we ask is that FIFA sticks to the rule and keeps out of politics instead of allowing illegal Israeli settlements to prosper.

We can do business with Guy Verhofstadt on Brexit

Guy Verhofstadt MEP’s appointment as the European Parliament’s lead negotiator on Brexit is very good news for us.

Verhofstadt, a highly influential MEP and former Prime Minister of Belgium, was a friend to Scotland after the EU referendum. He publicly tweeted "It's wrong that Scotland might be taken out of [the] EU when it voted to stay" and declared he would be happy to discuss this with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. Days later, he publicly stated that there was “no big obstacle” to an independent Scotland being a full member state of the European Union.

Guy will help to prepare the European Parliament’s position in the Brexit negotiations, and update the Conference of Presidents, comprised of the European Parliament President Martin Schulz and the Parliamentary group leaders.

He is a long-standing credible MEP, having negotiated Belgian politics he will be able to corral 27 national interests and be pragmatic about finding solutions. He has also proven he is alive to the Scottish question and I have every confidence all the doors we need are open.

He’s a clever chap, very astute, and a hard worker capable of seeing the big picture. I look forward to working with him in the European Parliament over the coming months.