Lord Boswell of Aynho  
Chairman, European Union Committee  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

5 December 2018

Dear Lord Boswell

I am delighted to have been appointed to the role of Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union at this pivotal moment in the country’s history. I very much look forward to our working together collaboratively and in the national interest over the months and years ahead.

I hope the Committee welcomes the progress that has been made in the negotiations on agreeing the terms of our exit from the European Union, as set out in the Withdrawal Agreement. In providing the draft and final documents to both Houses, the Government’s intention was to enable the EU Committee, parliamentarians and the public, to take forward the important work of scrutinising the Government’s proposed agreement with the EU as fully and as early as possible. This of course builds on all of the Committee’s scrutiny over the period since the referendum, not least since the draft Withdrawal Agreement was published in March.

I hope that this demonstrates the Government’s sincere commitment to providing for the fullest possible scrutiny consistent with the paramount importance of ensuring we achieved the best possible outcome from negotiations. As your letter of 23 October to my predecessor states, it is imperative that both Houses - and the wider public - are able to have an informed debate ahead of the vote on the final deal. In that context I am sorry that we were unable to agree on an opportunity for me to give evidence to the Committee on 5 December. Nevertheless I completely understand the Committee wished to focus upon its report, which I will read with interest, and which will undoubtedly make an important contribution to the House’s consideration of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration.

Finally, in response to your letter to my predecessor of 23 October, the recent publications demonstrate once again that the Government is meeting its commitment to UK parliamentarians not being at an information disadvantage with Members of the European Parliament indeed, overall the UK Government provides information more frequently, in more fora and on a wider basis than the Commission does to the European Parliament.
Of course, the European Parliament, as a co-decision body, has a constitutional relationship with the European Commission which is distinct from the relationship between HM Government and the UK Parliament, which can make direct comparisons between the two Parliaments difficult. But the Government continues to monitor activity in the European Parliament closely, and it is clear that, for example, the UK Government ministers have given considerably more frequent and full updates on the negotiations to the two Houses than have been given to the European Parliament plenary.

I look forward to appearing before the Committee soon, and to a productive working relationship.

RT HON STEPHEN BARCLAY MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION