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Owen Smith MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

5 July 2017

Dear Owen,

Northern Ireland Political Donations

I am writing to address in more detail the questions relating to political donations that were raised during Monday's statement, both during your remarks and those made by Sammy Wilson MP.

In January 2017, I wrote to party leaders in Northern Ireland to seek views on whether the time was now right to move to full transparency for political donations and loans to Northern Ireland political parties. This was in line with this Government's consistent emphasis on seeing the confidentiality arrangements around donations and loans removed as soon as circumstances allowed. All parties that responded expressed the view that full transparency should be introduced. The parties were also asked about the date from which transparency should take effect. Only the Alliance Party proposed that transparency should be implemented retrospectively in response.

There remains widespread support for full transparency among the people of Northern Ireland. And there has been a welcome recognition by the parties during the talks process of the need to put transparency at the heart of the work of the restored institutions. In line with that aim, and consistent with the commitment made in the Conservative Party Manifesto for Northern Ireland, I set out yesterday my intention to bring secondary legislation before Parliament that would provide for the publication of all donations and loans received by Northern Ireland parties. This would take effect in respect of donations and loans received on or after 1 July 2017. Having considered the written representations received, I did not believe it right to impose retrospective regulations on people who donated in accordance with the rules as set out in law at the time.

During yesterday's statement you asked about the thresholds for publication and whether these will be the same as those that apply in the rest of the UK. I can confirm that the same thresholds - donations or loans over £7,500 (or £1,500 for local accounting units) - will apply.

You also asked about donors being UK-registered voters and I can confirm that there are no plans to change the existing rules that individual UK donors and lenders must be on the

UK electoral register. As before, the eligibility of donors will continue to be verified by the Electoral Commission.

Sammy Wilson MP also sought an assurance that the transparency arrangements would apply to Irish donations to Northern Ireland parties. I am happy to provide this assurance and to confirm that all donations and loans received on or after 1 July 2017 above the thresholds set out above will be published when the legislation is passed.

More broadly, it is worth emphasising that Northern Ireland parties are already under the same obligation as parties in Great Britain to report donations, including Irish donations, to the Electoral Commission on a quarterly basis. The key difference is that the Commission is currently prohibited from publishing donation reports relating to Northern Ireland parties, whereas in Great Britain the Commission publish donation reports for parties there each quarter. The secondary legislation I propose would remove the prohibition on publication of Northern Ireland donations and loans and allow the Commission to then publish Northern Ireland donations and loans as part of its UK wide quarterly publication.

As I indicated in my statement, I intend to bring forward this secondary legislation to provide for full transparency shortly with a view to ensuring that this is passed in the autumn. I look forward to continued engagement with you and all MPs with an interest in this issue over the coming months.

I have copied this letter to Sammy Wilson MP. I am also placing a copy of this letter in the libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', is written over a faint, illegible printed name.

RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND