# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **FM VISIT TO BRITTANY 10-12 January 2018** |
| **DATE**  | **18 January 2018** |
| **BY** | **Carwyn Jones, First Minister** |

I visited Brittany last week to renew our Memorandum of Understanding with the President of the Regional Council Loïg Chesnais Girard. Wales’ relationship with Brittany is built on long-standing cultural, linguistic and trading links and the former First Minister first signed a MoU with Brittany in 2004. The changing political context in Wales, with the UK about to leave the EU, means that it is the right time to re-commit to our relationship with Brittany.

The MoU and Action Plan set out a number of themes which are of common interest to Wales and Brittany. These include business links, co-operation on education, marine energy, the environment culture and language. Later this this year for example, we will welcome a group of Breton further and higher education leaders to meet their counterparts in Wales with a view to developing an exchange programme for staff and students.

Our relationship may be constructed on ancient roots, but it is developing in a way that is absolutely contemporary, with cyber security as one of the areas identified for potential co-operation. In Rennes, I visited the French Cyber Pole of excellence, an impressive joint initiative between the French Government and the Regional Council which co-ordinates France’s research, defence, business and training offer. We discussed how the sector in Wales, which is the UK’s biggest cyber cluster, could co-operate with the Pole and officials will take this forward.

I participated in a conference in Brittany about the future of Europe in the light of Brexit, outlining how the Welsh Government is working to protect Wales’ interests. I underlined that while the UK is leaving the European Union, we are committed to maintaining and strengthening our relations with our partner regions and nations across Europe and our membership of European and international networks.

I was also able to reassure our Breton friends that Brexit should not disrupt the strong dynamic of collaboration which we have developed over the years and that the Welsh Government is pressing for continued UK participation in European programmes like Erasmus Plus, which have traditionally supported our collaboration.

It was an auspicious moment to renew the MoU as this year Wales will be the country of honour in the Interceltic Festival in Lorient, which attracts over 700,000 participants. During my visit, our cultural connection was celebrated by a concert at the new Congress centre in Rennes where the Breton symphonic orchestra - whose musical director, Grant Llewellyn, is from Wales - performed alongside the BBC National Orchestra of Wales Chorus, in a partnership which the orchestras are seeking to develop further.