

# PM's statement in the House: 19

## October 2019

Mr Speaker, I am very grateful to you, I am very grateful to the House of Commons staff, everybody who's put themselves out, everybody who has come to give up their time in this debate today.

It's been a very important debate, an exceptional moment for our country, an exceptional moment for our Parliament.

Alas the opportunity to have a meaningful vote has been effectively been passed up because the meaningful vote has been voided of meaning.

But I wish the House to know that I'm not daunted or dismayed by this particular result and I think it probably became likely once it was obvious that the amendment from my Right Honourable Friend the Member for West Dorset was going to remain on the order paper.

I continue in the very strong belief that the best thing for the UK and for the whole of Europe is for us to leave with this new deal on October 31.

And to anticipate the questions that are coming from the benches opposite, I will not negotiate a delay with the EU, and neither does the law compel me to do so.

I will tell our friends and colleagues in the EU exactly what I've told everyone in the last 88 days that I've served as Prime Minister: that further delay would be bad for this country, bad for the European Union and bad for democracy.

So next week the Government will introduce the legislation needed for us to leave the EU with our new deal on October 31.

And I hope that our European Union colleagues and friends will not be attracted as the benches opposite are by delay. I don't think they'll be attracted by delay.

And I hope that then Honourable Members faced with a choice of our new deal, our new deal for the UK and the European Union, will change their minds because it was pretty close today. I hope that they will change their minds and support this deal in overwhelming numbers.

Since I became Prime Minister I've said we must get on and get Brexit done on October 31 so that this country can move on.

Mr Speaker, that policy remains unchanged, no delays, and I will continue to do all I can to get Brexit done on October 31 and I continue to commend this excellent deal, Mr Speaker, to the House.

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Mr Speaker, I want to begin by echoing what you've just said, my gratitude to all members of the House for assembling on a Saturday for the first time in 37 years and indeed to all members of the House of Commons staff who have worked to make this possible.

I know this has meant people giving up their Saturdays, breaking into their weekends at a time when families want to be together, and of course it means missing at least the end of England's World Cup quarter final.

I apologise to the House for that and I wish I could watch it myself.

I know the Honourable Member for Cardiff West has postponed his 60th birthday party – if not his 60th birthday – to be here.

So Mr Speaker the House has gone to a great deal of trouble to assemble here on a Saturday for the first time in a generation.

And I do hope for the purposes of a meaningful vote that we will indeed be allowed to have a meaningful vote this evening.

And with permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement on the new agreement with our European friends.

The House will need no reminding that this is the second deal and the fourth vote, three and half years after the nation voted for Brexit.

And during those years, friendships have been strained, families divided and the attention of this House consumed by a single issue that has at times felt incapable of resolution.

But I hope Mr Speaker, that this is the moment when we can finally achieve that resolution and reconcile the instincts that compete within us.

Many times in the last 30 years I have heard our European friends remark that this country is half-hearted in its EU membership and it is true that we in the UK have often been a backmarker opting out of the single currency, not taking part in Schengen, very often trying to block some collective ambition.

And in the last three years and a half years it has been striking that members on all sides of this House have debated Brexit in almost entirely practical terms in an argument that has focused on the balance of economic risk and advantage.

And I don't think I can recall a time when I have heard a single member stand up and call for Britain to play her full part in the political construction

of a federal Europe.

I don't think I've heard a single member call for an ever closer union or ever deeper integration or a federal destiny – mon pays Europe – perhaps I've missed it but I don't think I've heard much of it Mr Speaker.

And there is a whole side of that debate that you hear regularly in other European capitals that is simply absent from our national conversation and I don't think that has changed much in the last 30 years.

But if we have been sceptical, and if we have been anxious about the remoteness of the bureaucracy, if we have been dubious about the rhetoric of union and integration, if we have been half-hearted Europeans,

Then it follows logically that with part of our hearts, with half our hearts, we feel something else, a sense of love and respect for European culture and civilisation of which we are a part; a desire to cooperate with our friends and partners in everything, creatively, artistically, intellectually.

A sense of our shared destiny and a deep understanding of the eternal need – especially after the horrors of the last century – for Britain to stand as one of the guarantors of peace and democracy in our continent.

And it is our continent. And it is precisely because we are capable of feeling both things at once – sceptical about the modes of EU integration as we are but passionate and enthusiastic about Europe – that the whole experience of the last few years has been so difficult for this country and so divisive.

And that is why it is now so urgent for us to move on and build a new relationship with our friends in the EU on the basis of a new deal – a deal that can heal the rift in British politics, unite the warring instincts in us all.

And now is the time for this great House of Commons to come together and bring the country together today as I believe people at home are hoping and expecting, with a new way forward and a new and better deal both for Britain and our friends in the EU, and that is the advantage of the agreement that we have struck with our friends in the last two days.

Because this new deal allows the UK – whole and entire – to leave the EU on October 31st in accordance with the referendum while simultaneously looking forward to a new partnership based on the closest ties of friendship and co-operation.

And I pay tribute to our European friends for escaping the prison of existing positions and showing the vision to be flexible by re-opening the Withdrawal Agreement and thereby addressing the deeply felt concerns of many in this House.

And one of my most important jobs is to express those concerns to our European friends.

I shall continue to listen to all Honourable Members throughout the debate today, to meet with anyone on any side and to welcome the scrutiny the House will bring to bear if – as I hope – we proceed to consider the Withdrawal Agreement Bill next week.

Today this House has an historic opportunity to show the same breadth of vision as our European neighbours.

The same ability and resolve to reach beyond past disagreements by getting Brexit done and moving this country forwards, as we all yearn to do.

This agreement provides for a real Brexit, taking back control of our borders, laws, money, farming, fisheries and trade, amounting to the greatest single restoration of national sovereignty in Parliamentary history.

It removes the backstop which would have held us against our will in the Customs Union and much of the Single Market.

For the first time in almost five decades the UK will be able to strike free trade deals with our friends across the world to benefit the whole country – including Northern Ireland.

Article 4 of the Protocol states: “Northern Ireland is part of the customs territory of the United Kingdom”.

It adds “nothing in this Protocol shall prevent” Northern Ireland from realising the preferential market access in any free trade deals “on the same terms as goods produced in other parts of the United Kingdom.”

Our negotiations have focused on the uniquely sensitive nature of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

And we have respected those sensitivities.

Above all, we and our European friends have preserved the letter and the spirit of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and upheld the long-standing areas of co-operation between the UK and Ireland, including the Common Travel Area.

And as I told the House on 3rd October, in order to prevent a regulatory border on the island of Ireland we proposed a regulatory zone covering all goods, including agri-food, eliminating any need for associated checks along the border.

And Mr Speaker, in this agreement we have gone further by also finding a solution to the vexed question of customs, which many in this House have raised.

Our agreement ensures – and I quote – “unfettered market access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom’s internal market.”

It ensures that there should be no tariffs on goods circulating within the UK

customs territory, that is between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, unless they are at risk of entering the EU.

It ensures an open border on the island of Ireland, a common objective of everyone in this House.

And it ensures that for those living and working alongside the border there will be no visible or practical changes to their lives – they can carry on as before.

I believe this is a good arrangement, reconciling the special circumstances in Northern Ireland with the minimum possible bureaucratic consequences at a few points of arrival into Northern Ireland.

And it is precisely to ensure that those arrangements are acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland that we have made consent a fundamental element of this new deal.

So no arrangements can be imposed on Northern Ireland if they do not work for Northern Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland will have the right under this agreement to express or withhold their consent to these provisions, by means of a majority vote in their Assembly four years after the end of the transition.

And if the Assembly chooses to withhold consent, these provisions “shall cease to apply” after two years, during which the Joint Committee of the UK and EU would propose a new way forward, in concert with Northern Ireland’s institutions.

And as soon as this House allows the process of extracting ourselves from the EU to be completed, the exciting enterprise of building our new relationship with our friends can begin which has been too long delayed.

And Mr Speaker, I do not wish this to be the project of any one Government or any one party but rather the endeavour of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Only this Parliament can make this new relationship the work of the nation.

And so Parliament should be at the heart of decision-making as we develop our approach.

And I acknowledge that in the past we have not always acted in that spirit.

So as we take forward our friendship with our closest neighbours and construct that new relationship

I will ensure that a broad and open process draws upon the wealth of expertise in every part of this House including select committees and their chairs.

Every party and every Member who wishes to contribute will be invited to do so.

And we shall start by debating the mandate for our negotiators in the next phase.

Mr Speaker, the ambition for our future friendship is contained in the revised Political Declaration which also provides for this House to be free to decide our own laws and regulations.

I have complete faith in this House to choose regulations that are in our best tradition of the highest standards of environmental protections and workers' rights.

No one anywhere in this chamber believes in lowering standards, instead we believe in improving them as indeed we will be able to do and seizing the opportunities of our new freedoms.

For example, free from the Common Agricultural Policy, we will have a far simpler system where we will reward farmers for improving our environment and animal welfare many of whose provisions are impossible under the current arrangements, instead of just paying them for their acreage.

And free from the Common Fisheries Policy, we can ensure sustainable yields based on the latest science not outdated methods of setting quotas.

And these restored powers will be available not simply to this Government but to every future British Government of any party to use as they see fit.

That is what restoring sovereignty means, that is what is meant in practice by taking back control of our destiny.

And our first decision, on which I believe there will be unanimity is that in any future trade negotiations with any country our National Health Service will not be on the table.

Mr Speaker, I am convinced that an overwhelming majority in this House, regardless of our personal views, wishes to see Brexit delivered in accordance with the referendum. A majority.

And in this crucial mission there can no longer be any argument for further delay.

As someone who passionately believed that we had to go back to our European friends to seek a better agreement,

I must tell the House that with this new deal the scope for fruitful negotiation has run its course.

They said that we couldn't re-open the Withdrawal Agreement, Mr Speaker, they said we couldn't change a comma of the Withdrawal Agreement, they said we couldn't abolish the backstop, Mr Speaker, we've done both.

But it is now my judgement that we have reached the best possible solution.

So those who agree, like me that Brexit must be delivered and who – like me –

prefer to avoid a no deal outcome, must abandon the delusion that this House can delay again.

And I must tell the House in all candour that there is very little appetite among our friends in the EU for this business to be protracted by one extra day.

They have had three and a half years of this debate.

It has distracted them from their own projects and their own ambitions and if there is one feeling that unites the British public with a growing number of the officials of the EU it is a burning desire to get Brexit done.

and I must tell the House again in all candour that whatever letters they may seek to force the government to write, it cannot change my judgment that further delay is pointless, expensive and deeply corrosive of public trust.

And people simply will not understand how politicians can say with one breath that they want delay to avoid no deal and then with the next breath that they still want delay when a great deal is there to be done.

Now is the time Mr Speaker to get this thing done, and I say to all members let us come together as democrats to end this debilitating feud.

Let us come together as democrats behind this deal, the one proposition that fulfils the verdict of the majority but which also allows us to bring together the two halves of our hearts, to bring together the two halves of our nation.

Let's speak now both for the 52 and the 48.

Let us go for a deal that can heal this country, let's go for a deal that can heal this country and allow us all to express our legitimate desires for the deepest possible friendship and partnership with our neighbours

A deal that allows us to create a new shared destiny with them.

And a deal that also allows us to express our confidence in our own democratic institutions, to make our own laws, to determine our own future, to believe in ourselves once again as an open, generous global, outward-looking and free-trading United Kingdom.

That is the prospect that this deal offers our country.

It is a great prospect and a great deal, and I commend it to the House.

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# National roll-out of electronic prescription service

All prescriptions across England will be digitised to make staff and patients' lives easier, Primary Care Minister Jo Churchill has announced today.

The electronic prescription service (EPS) will be rolled out nationally next month, following rigorous testing involving 60 GP practices and hundreds of pharmacies.

Almost 70% of all prescriptions are already being prescribed and dispensed through EPS and there has been positive feedback from GPs and pharmacies. Once the roll-out of the final stage is completed, nearly all prescriptions will be sent electronically.

A unique prescription barcode will be given to patients, which can be scanned at any pharmacy to retrieve medication details. This information is held on the secure NHS database and will allow a patient's prescription to be accessed quickly by GPs and pharmacies.

The EPS will save the NHS £300 million by 2021 by increasing efficiencies, reducing the amount of paper processing required and reducing prescribing errors.

It will increase efficiencies across the NHS by:

- eliminating the need for patients to pick up repeat prescriptions from their GP
- allowing prescribers to digitally sign and cancel electronic prescriptions, rather than using a physical signature
- reducing the amount of administration needed around prescriptions, and reduce the volume of prescriptions that need to be stored

Primary Care Minister Jo Churchill said:

Digitising the entire prescription service is a key part of keeping up the drive to make the NHS fit for the 21st century. This will free up vital time for GPs and allow pharmacists to spend more time with their patients, and save millions of pounds a year.

It's another important step towards eventually making all prescriptions paperless. We are continuing to improve technology across the NHS, which will ultimately improve care for patients.

Dr Ian Lowry, Director of Digital Medicines and Pharmacy at NHS Digital, said:



Every prescription that is sent electronically saves money for the NHS by increasing efficiency. The system is also safer and more secure, as prescriptions can't be lost and clinicians can check their status online.

This is a huge milestone to reach, and one which benefits patients, GPs, pharmacists and the NHS as a whole.

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## We will robustly defend human rights here at the UN and beyond

The UK associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the EU on behalf of EU member states. Allow me to set out our national approach at this time.

The UK Government's policy is that the UK will leave the EU on 31 October. After we have left, we will continue to work closely with the EU in pursuit of our shared interests and values, and will remain committed to human rights and to the Rules Based International System.

Mr Chair, 74 years ago the first UN Member States signed the UN Charter, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and reaffirming the dignity of human beings. One of the very first tasks of this Committee, set up specifically to focus on human rights, was to agree the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights, and the idea that the relationship between people and states is not one of subservient obedience, but one where the State has obligations to the individual, are core to everything the United Nations stands for. As the Foreign Secretary has made clear, at the UK's core is a strong moral anchor. Make no mistake; we will robustly defend human rights here at the UN and beyond.

Mr Chair, there are three priorities that I would like to focus on: i) Freedom of religion or belief; ii) Gender equality and the rights of LGBT people; iii) Media freedom and civil society space.

Firstly, the UK remains resolutely committed to championing freedom of religion or belief. Building mutual understanding and respect between communities is essential to fighting intolerance. We will never stand by while individuals are persecuted, designated as 'extremists', or arbitrarily detained, because of their religion or ethnicity.

Mr Chair, be in no doubt that we will continue to speak up for the rights of religious minorities across the world.

Secondly, the UK will continue to advance gender equality and vigorously defend the rights of LGBT people.

Let me be clear that attempts to roll back hard-won gains on access to sexual and reproductive health are a shameful attack on women's rights. It is harrowing that 23,000 women die each year from dangerous backstreet abortions. Meanwhile, heinous acts like rape and sexual violence proliferate as weapons of war.

That is why, next month, the UK will host a conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict with the objective of strengthening justice for survivors and holding perpetrators to account.

Equally, we cannot stand silent while people face persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. All too often, state authorities allow the perpetrators of such hate crimes to escape justice. No one should suffer discrimination because of whom they love.

Finally, a rich civil society is vital to safeguard our human rights. To this end, media freedom is essential. Journalists must hold the powerful to account. Never should media workers live in fear for their lives for doing their job. We encourage those Member States who have not yet signed the Media Freedom Pledge to do so, and join the Global Coalition to fight the curtailment of media freedom.

All too often, those who protect human rights face threats because of their work. While states introduce increasingly restrictive legislation to shrink civil society space. We are committed to championing civil society, both in the field and in discussions at the UN. That is why we are pleased to announce today the UK's candidacy for the NGO Committee, which plays a vital role in promoting civil society at the UN.

Mr Chair, we can do better, and we must. States must fulfil their commitments now, not at a far off date when some political, economic, or development stars might align.

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## **We strongly condemn any act of intimidation and reprisal**

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of United Kingdom as well as on behalf of 69 other countries.

Civil society and human rights defenders play a crucial role in supporting our work at the United Nations and the healthy functioning of democratic

institutions. They not only enrich our process of decision-making, but their contributions also ensure that the impact of the decisions we make here at the UN reach those furthest behind, in line with our existing obligations and commitments, in particular under the UN Charter and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate, seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the UN undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the UN as a whole, including the human rights system.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report and share his alarm about the growing number of reprisals, which take many forms. We share in particular the concern that women human rights defenders are disproportionately exposed to gender-specific barriers, threats and violence, and are alarmed at the number of attacks against journalists and media workers. We strongly condemn any act of intimidation and reprisal, whether online or offline, against individuals and groups who cooperate, seek to cooperate, or have cooperated with the UN. In this respect, we urge States to prevent and ensure adequate protection against such acts by raising awareness and by investigating and ensuring accountability and effective remedy for such acts, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors as well as to inform the Secretary-General and the Human Rights Council accordingly. We must be determined to do all we can to enable them to work and live in safety and without fear of any kind of intimidation or violence. In this regard, we welcome the positive steps taken by those States who have responded to acts of reprisals against persons and groups in their respective countries.

We welcome the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 42/28, which invites the General Assembly to remain seized of all work in this area. We are convinced that the exploration of all avenues of action is crucial. We highly appreciate the work of Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Andrew Gilmour, who has lead the UN efforts to put an end to this condemnable practice. We strongly believe that this mandate ensures a more systematised, coordinated response to the deeply worrying issue of intimidation and reprisals, including against human rights defenders, and will help to put an end to impunity for these attacks. We encourage Member States to cooperate with the Assistant Secretary-General and assist him to fulfill his mandate. We place special emphasis on raising awareness and on the dissemination of best practices.

Mr. Chair, notwithstanding the primary obligation of States to prevent and address reprisals, and to uphold the highest standard of human rights promotion and protection, the UN system also has a duty to prevent and respond to alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals against those who provide information or seek to engage with it, and to ensure accountability when these acts occur. In this respect, we encourage all UN bodies, mechanisms and agencies to strengthen the collective response to reprisals and continue to give detailed consideration to such cases brought to their attention, and to take immediate steps, including by submitting them to Assistant Secretary-General Gilmour and to the Secretary-General as contributions for his annual report. We would also welcome more frequent reporting on the issue of reprisals and follow-up by Assistant Secretary-

General Gilmour, including here in New York, thereby increasing awareness, accountability and ensuring a more timely response.

Mr Chair, civil society and human rights defenders are important parts of vibrant societies which encourage openness, transparency and dialogue between people and those in power. The UN, as a global community, must be an example of best practice and ensure all civil society organisations and human rights defenders who wish to engage with the UN system are able to do so without fear of reprisal or intimidation. This will send a message that we value their contribution and will continue to mitigate the risks they face and provide them with opportunities to engage meaningfully with the UN system.

Thank you, Mr Chair.