

Statement to Parliament: PM statement on Brexit: 15 October 2018

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House ahead of this week's European Council.

We are entering the final stages of these negotiations.

This is the time for cool, calm heads to prevail.

And it is the time for a clear-eyed focus on the few remaining but critical issues that are still to be agreed.

Yesterday the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union went to Brussels for further talks with Michel Barnier.

There has inevitably been a great deal of inaccurate speculation.

So, I want to set out clearly for the House, the facts as they stand.

First, we have made real progress in recent weeks on both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration on our future relationship.

And I want to pay tribute to both negotiating teams for the many, many hours of hard work that have got us to this point.

In March, we agreed legal text around the implementation period, citizens' rights and the financial settlement.

And we have now made good progress on text concerning the majority of the outstanding issues.

Taken together, the shape of a deal across the vast majority of the withdrawal agreement – the terms of our exit – are now clear.

We also have broad agreement on the structure and scope of the framework for our future relationship, with progress on issues like security, transport and services.

And perhaps, most significantly, we have made progress on Northern Ireland – where, Mr Speaker, the EU have been working with us to respond to the very real concerns we had on their original proposals.

Mr Speaker, let me remind the House why this is so important.

Both the UK and the EU share a profound responsibility to ensure the preservation of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, protecting the hard won peace and stability in Northern Ireland and ensuring that life continues essentially as it does now.

We agree that our future economic partnership should provide for solutions to

the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland in the long term.

And, while we are both committed to ensuring that this future relationship is in place by the end of the implementation period, we accept that there is a chance that there may be a gap between the two.

This is what creates the need for a backstop to ensure that, if such a temporary gap were ever to arise, there would be no hard-border between Northern Ireland and Ireland – or indeed anything that would threaten the integrity of our precious union.

So this backstop is intended to be an insurance policy for people of Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Previously, the European Union had proposed a backstop that would see Northern Ireland carved-off in the EU's customs union and parts of the single market, separated through a border in the Irish Sea from the UK's own internal market.

As I have said many times, I could never accept that, no matter how unlikely such a scenario may be.

Creating any form of customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK would mean a fundamental change in the day-to-day experience for businesses in Northern Ireland – with the potential to affect jobs and investment.

We published our proposals on customs in the backstop in June, and after Salzburg, I said we would bring forward our own further proposals – and that is what we have done in these negotiations.

And the European Union have responded positively by agreeing to explore a UK-wide customs solution to this backstop.

But Mr Speaker, two problems remain.

First, the EU says there is not time to work out the detail of this UK-wide solution in the next few weeks.

So even with the progress we have made, the EU still requires a “backstop to the backstop” – effectively an insurance policy for the insurance policy.

And they want this to be the Northern Ireland-only solution that they had previously proposed.

We have been clear that we cannot agree to anything that threatens the integrity of our United Kingdom.

And I am sure the whole House shares the government's view on this.

Indeed, the House of Commons set out its view when agreeing unanimously part 6, section 55 of the Taxation (Cross-border Trade Act) on a single United Kingdom customs territory.

This states:

“It shall be unlawful for Her Majesty’s Government to enter into arrangements under which Northern Ireland forms part of a separate customs territory to Great Britain.”

So, Mr Speaker, this message is clear – not just from this government, but from this whole House.

Second, Mr Speaker, I need to be able to look the British people in the eye and say this backstop is a temporary solution.

People are rightly concerned that what is only meant to be temporary could become a permanent limbo – with no new relationship between the UK and the EU ever agreed.

I am clear we are not going to be trapped permanently in a single customs territory unable to do meaningful trade deals.

So it must be the case, first, that the backstop should not need to come into force.

Second, that if it does, it must be temporary.

And third – while I do not believe this will be the case – if the EU were not to co-operate on our future relationship, we must be able to ensure that we cannot be kept in this backstop arrangement indefinitely.

I would not expect this House to agree to a deal unless we have the reassurance that the UK, as a sovereign nation, has this say over our arrangements with the EU.

Mr Speaker, I do not believe the UK and the EU are far apart.

We both agree that Article 50 cannot provide the legal basis for a permanent relationship.

And we both agree this backstop must be temporary.

So we must now work together to give effect to that agreement.

Mr Speaker, so much of these negotiations are necessarily technical.

But the reason this all matters is because it affects the future of our country.

It affects jobs and livelihoods in every community. It is about what kind of country we are and about our faith in our democracy.

Of course, it is frustrating that almost all of the remaining points of disagreement are focused on how we manage a scenario which both sides hope should never come to pass – and which if it does, will only be temporary.

We cannot let this disagreement derail the prospects of a good deal and leave

us with the no deal outcome that no-one wants.

I continue to believe that a negotiated deal is the best outcome for the UK and for the European Union.

I continue to believe that such a deal is achievable.

And that is the spirit in which I will continue to work with our European partners.

And I commend this Statement to the House.

[World news story: Guatemala joins the Americas to combat illegal wildlife trade](#)

Representatives of Belize, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and the US attended the meeting. Minor García, Deputy Director of the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) represented Guatemala.

Deputy Director Garcia and other countries' delegates were hosted by Thérèse Coffey, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. According to official statistics, illegal wildlife trade is worth more than £17 billion a year, and is directly linked to transnational organized crime structures.

Participating countries recognised that Illegal Wildlife Trade is a major issue in the Americas, and that it should be treated as a serious and organised crime that affects the economy, security, indigenous communities and ecosystems in the region.

Representatives decided to work collaboratively to tackle the trafficking of flora and fauna, including poaching, on a regional and international scale. To affirm this intention, all delegations recognised the need for regional collaboration on this issue.

At the end of the meeting, delegations welcomed the announcement from Peru that it will hold a regional conference on IWT in Lima in 2019, building on the work undertaken at London 2018.

This special meeting took place in the margins of the global conference on illegal wildlife trade, which ended 12 October in London and was organized by the British Government. Politicians, entrepreneurs and civil society from around the world met to seek for medium and long term solutions to tackle

this problem.

[News story: Coal Authority flying the flag for women's suffrage](#)

The green, white and violet suffrage flag arrived at the Coal Authority's headquarters as part of a national flag relay, which has seen it touring government departments across Britain.

During its week-long stay with the organisation it featured at various events, such as at talks by industry experts and at national meetings in London attended by the Coal Authority's Chief Executive. It also accompanied female members of staff to various sites in former coalfields, such as at the Blackwell A-Winning mine water treatment scheme, the National Coal Mining Museum at Caphouse Colliery in West Yorkshire, and the Farmilo Primary School at Pleasley, which had carried out projects on the suffragette movement earlier in the year.

In July, children from Farmilo Primary School attended a picnic at St. Barnabas Church in the village as part of the re-enactment of a suffragette pilgrimage from Newcastle to London in 1917, when the suffragettes, including Millicent Fawcett, had stopped at the church.

On Thursday, the flag was at the centre of a pictorial exhibition featuring women in the coal mining industry at the Coal Authority's Mining Heritage Centre based in Nottinghamshire. Taken from the extensive archives, the pictures depict women working within the mining industry, ranging from coal picking on pit surfaces to female pithead baths and right through to the days of the annual Coal Queen contest in Blackpool.

Women worked underground in coal mines until the Coal Mines Act 1842, which banned all females and boys under 10 from working underground. However, in the Lancashire, Cumberland and West Yorkshire coalfields they were still allowed to work on the surface, carrying out general duties such as emptying tubs of coal and working on the screening plant.

The flag marks the 100 year anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which not only gave women over the age of 30 who owned property the right to vote in local and national elections, but also gave all men the right to vote for the first time too.

It began its country-wide journey in February and since then has been touring around various government departments and offices.

The Coal Authority employs 242 people and 40% are women working in a variety of roles, including engineers, geochemists, programme managers and

hydrogeologist.

It appointed its first female Chief Executive, Lisa Pinney MBE, in May 2018.

She is delighted that the Coal Authority is hosting the flag:

We are really honoured to be part of the flag's journey, it's a great boost for us as an organisation because it not only commemorates all those women and men who fought for the right to vote but also highlights the massive role women have played within the mining industry. In the past they actually worked underground, then carried out many roles on the surface and in more recent years became a driving force within mining communities.

The flag also gives us the opportunity to celebrate the diversity and inclusion that can be found across Britain today, such as here at the Coal Authority where we have female workers right across the organisation, such as engineers, geochemists and project managers.

[Speech: Minister for the Constitution speech at European Commission: 15 Oct 2018](#)

Introduction

We agree democracy is essential for free, well-governed societies to prosper.

We in the UK, along with you, are part of a community, extolling the virtues of democracy.

But as the leaders of the G7 agreed earlier this year in the Charlevoix, "democracy and the rules-based international order are increasingly being challenged by authoritarianism and the defiance of international norms".

It's up to all of us to work together to defend our democracy and preserve it for future generations. In my view we must respect it, protect it and promote it – those are the themes I will be working on in the UK, Europe and around the world.

As the Minister for the Constitution in the UK Government, today, I will set out what we are doing to defend the UK's democracy. We are committed to:

- maintaining transparency, fairness and equality for parties, campaigners and voters

- we want to protect the safety and security of the electoral process, free from fraud and interference
- and we want to build on our democratic traditions to remain world leaders in maintaining confidence in our democracy

Transparency for digital campaigning

Starting with one of the challenges we face – for the last three decades the internet has not only revolutionised the way we interact with each other, it has revolutionised the way we do politics, too.

Information is only a moment away, and on the whole those changes are positive.

Thirty years ago, voters also didn't also have to worry about whether their choice was being influenced by misleading political ads on social media.

The digital landscape poses challenges which we can't afford to shy away from addressing.

On international affairs – we know that certain states routinely use disinformation, bots and hacking as foreign policy tools. It's not surprising that they should try to influence other countries democratic systems to further their own agendas.

Democracy is based on citizens being confident that the elections they vote in are fair and transparent.

Governments must act to meet the pressures of digital campaigning so this confidence is assured, in terms of foreign-originated content, but of course also domestic content and debate too.

We are working to protect the news environment so accurate content can prevail and has a sustainable future.

We have to be alive to the fact that traditional news outlets aren't the main source of information anymore.

We must give everyone the skills they need to distinguish between fact and fabrication.

In the UK, we are publicly consulting on how to require digital campaigning material to include the details of who has produced it.

Because voters need to see which organisation or individual is targeting them.

Salisbury

People need to be informed about the threats facing our country. I am immensely proud of the work done by the National Security Communications Team and the government's Russia unit in revealing the role of the GRU in the despicable Salisbury attack.

The actions of the GRU are genuinely a threat to all our allies in democracy.

We are working together by sharing information about their activity with our international partners so that others can learn more about the threat they pose.

Safety and security of elections

In the UK, we have seen no evidence of successful interference in our democratic processes. We are vigilant.

I am confident that our voting system is secure.

Whilst UK voting systems do not lend themselves to direct electronic manipulation because our ballots are conducted with paper and pen.

But we recognise that confidence in the electoral system, and participation in it, are very much linked.

In the UK – there's a reform we're doing – you only need to say your name and address to get your ballot paper – a test based on a 19th century assumption that people knew their neighbours at the polling station.

Clearly, this process can be open to abuse and needs to be updated for our more modern, populous society.

One approach is to bring the UK in line with other European countries such as the Netherlands, France and Germany and many others where people can confirm their identity when they vote.

Conclusion

We know it is vital that everyone has confidence that their vote is theirs, and theirs alone.

Not only that – they have to feel that their vote matters, and that their voice is being heard, too.

I want the reputation of the UK's democracy to be absolutely solid:

- known for its transparency and fairness
- known for being a safe and secure electoral system, untainted by misinformation
- I want it known for being a democracy that genuinely does work for every voter
- and known for the willingness of its government to work hard to increase confidence in our democracy for the people it serves

As I said, we must respect, protect and promote our democracy for the next generation.

That work has a vital task for our times.

[Press release: Environmental performance of business continues to improve report shows](#)

Every year, the regulator publishes its Regulating for People, the Environment and Growth (RPEG) report which sets out the regulatory performance of businesses holding environmental permits in England and the effectiveness of the EA's regulatory approach.

The report shows that 93% of the 14,000 businesses the EA regulates demonstrated good compliance with their environmental permit conditions. Businesses which harmed the environment, however faced record penalties. A total of £25.5 million in fines were issued by the courts for environmental offences brought by the Agency compared to £8 million last year.

Waste crime continues to blight communities, cause environmental harm, and undercut legitimate business. The Environment Agency is closing more than two illegal waste sites every day but discovering a similar number of new illegal sites. The report acknowledges waste crime is becoming more organised and that more needs to be done. This will be addressed in the government's forthcoming organised waste crime review, which has examined how the Environment Agency, partners, and the law enforcement system can best tackle the problem.

The report also highlights the increased use of Enforcement Undertakings for less serious environmental incidents. In 2017/18 there were a record £2.2 million worth of Enforcement Undertakings accepted by the Agency. By companies admitting liability and making a financial contribution to put right the harm they have caused, both the environment and communities benefit.

Other key findings include:

- 812 illegal waste sites were shutdown in 2017/18; more than 2 a day.
- Serious pollution incidents fell to 419, down 18% compared to 2016.
- The number of persistently poorly managed sites reduced by 18% compared to 2016.
- Environmental charities, organisations and projects received almost £2.2 million, compared to £0.9 million in 2016, in Enforcement Undertakings.

Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director of the Environment Agency, said:

Our regulation is supporting a healthier environment and safer communities – serious pollution incidents fell by 18%. We closed down over 800 illegal waste sites, and the courts have imposed record levels of fines on companies for environmental offences.

We are committed to supporting businesses to innovate and grow, in return, we expect that businesses take their responsibilities to protecting the environment seriously.

The report can be found [here](#)