

Our future relationship with the EU: Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's statement to Parliament

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like now to make a statement on the Government's approach to our Future Relationship with the European Union.

Now that Britain has left the EU we are entering a new chapter in the history of these islands.

This Government has honoured the clearly expressed wish of the British people. Their instruction to us, their servants, to secure our departure from the EU has been followed. The votes of 17.4 million people – more than have ever voted for any democratic proposition in our history – were implemented on January 31 and we are now on a new journey.

As a sovereign, self-governing, independent nation we will have the freedom to frame our own laws, control our own borders, lower all our taxes, set our own tariffs, determine our own trade relationships and ensure we follow the people's priorities on security, the economy and democratic accountability.

Over the next nine months we will negotiate a new relationship with our friends and partners in the EU based on free trade and friendly co-operation. We have today published the approach for those negotiations and copies of the document – [The Future Relationship with the EU](#) – were made available to Members in the Vote Office from 9.30 am.

Talks with the EU on our future relationship begin next week and it is our aim to secure a comprehensive free trade agreement as well as agreement on questions such as fisheries, internal security and aviation.

We are confident that those negotiations will lead to outcomes which work for both the UK and the EU. But this House, our European partners and, above all, the British people should be in no doubt: at the end of the Transition Period, on the 31 December, the United Kingdom will fully recover its economic and political independence. We want the best possible trading relationship with the EU but in pursuit of a deal we will not trade away our sovereignty.

The Government's vision for the UK's future relationship with the EU was outlined with crystal clarity by the Prime Minister during the general election campaign, and the election result comprehensively confirmed public support for our direction of travel. And in his speech in the Painted Hall in Greenwich on February 3rd, the Prime Minister laid out in detail how we will reach our destination.

The first principle of our approach is that we wish to secure a relationship based on friendly cooperation between sovereign equals. We respect the EU's

sovereignty, autonomy and distinctive legal order, and we expect them to respect ours.

We will not accept nor agree to any obligations where our laws are aligned with the EU or the EU's institutions, including the Court of Justice.

Instead, each party will respect the other's independence and the right to manage its own borders, immigration policy and taxes.

The second, and allied, principle of our approach is that we will seek to emulate and build on the types of relationship that the EU already has with other independent sovereign states.

We will use precedents already well established and understood to ensure both sides' sovereignty is respected. And by using already existing precedents we should be able to expedite agreement. We will seek functioning arrangements the EU will recognise from its many other relationships.

So our proposal draws on existing EU agreements such as the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with Canada, the EU/Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and the EU/South Korea Free Trade Agreement.

This approach will enable us to move swiftly towards the goal envisaged in the Political Declaration agreed last October, in which both sides set the aim of concluding a 'zero tariffs, zero quotas' Free Trade Agreement, or FTA.

And as well as concluding a full FTA, we will require a wholly separate agreement on fisheries. We will take back control of our waters, as an independent coastal state, and will not link access to our waters to access to EU markets. Our fishing waters are our sovereign resource and we will determine other countries' access to our resources on our terms.

We also hope to conclude an agreement on law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters so we can work with the EU to protect their citizens, and ours, from shared threats. But we will not allow our own legal order to be compromised. And by taking back full control of our borders we can implement measures to make the British people even safer, and we can tackle terrorism and organised crime even more effectively.

We also wish to conclude a number of technical agreements covering aviation and civil nuclear cooperation which will help ensure continuity for the UK on its new footing as an independent sovereign nation.

Now securing agreement on all these questions should not, in principle, be difficult. We are, after all, only seeking relationships with the EU which it has with other nations, relationships that respect the interests and sovereignty of both partners.

And it is in that light we should view discussions about what has been termed the 'level playing field'. It has been argued that EU demands in this area will make full agreement difficult. Yet there is no intrinsic reason why requirements that both parties uphold desirable standards should prejudice any deal. The United Kingdom has a proud record when it comes to

environmental enhancement, workers' rights and social protection.

In a number of key areas, we either exceed EU standards or have led the way to improve standards. On workers' rights, for example, the UK offers a year of maternity leave – with the option to convert this to parental leave so that both parents can share care. The EU minimum is just 14 weeks.

And on environmental standards, we were the first country in the world to introduce legally-binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets through the Climate Change Act. We were also the first major global economy to set a legally-binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the economy by 2050.

We will not dilute any existing protections – indeed, as the Environment Bill debated yesterday demonstrates, we wish to go further and faster than the EU in improving the natural environment. We do not need the EU's permission to be a liberal nation leading the world in the fight against climate change and for social progress.

And that is why the UK Government seeks an FTA with robust protections for 'the environment' and 'labour standards'. But we do not see why the test of suitability in these areas should be adherence to EU law and submission to EU models of governance. The EU does not apply those principles to Free Trade Agreements with other sovereign nations and they should not apply to a sovereign United Kingdom.

Some argue that we must accept EU procedures as the benchmark because of the scale of UK trade with the EU. But the volume of UK trade with the EU is no greater than the volume of US trade with the EU, and the EU was more than willing to offer zero tariff access to the US without the application of EU procedures to US standard-setting.

And the EU has also argued that the UK is a unique case owing to its geographical location. But proximity is not a determining factor in any other FTA between other neighbouring states with large economies. It is not a reason for us to accept EU rules and regulations. You need only to look at the USMCA agreement between the US, Canada and Mexico for an example of a trade agreement that does not require regulatory alignment to one side's rules, or demand a role for one side's court. Geography is no reason to undermine democracy.

To be clear: we will not be seeking to dynamically align with EU rules on EU terms governed by EU laws and EU institutions.

The British people voted to take back control, to bring power home, to have the rules governing this country made by those who are directly accountable to the people of this country. And that is what we are delivering

Mr Speaker, the negotiations are due to begin next week, led by the Prime Minister's Sherpa, David Frost, and I'd like to end by looking ahead optimistically to the coming months.

There is ample time during the transition period to strike the right deal for

the UK. We hope to reach a broad agreement ahead of the EU Council's high-level summit in June, whereupon we will take stock.

We know our proposals are measured and our approach is fair; we know what we want to achieve; we are ready to go.

And this Government is committed to establishing the future relationship in ways that benefit the whole of the UK and strengthen the Union.

We are committed to working with the devolved administrations to deliver a future relationship with the EU that works for the whole of the UK.

And may I take this opportunity to reassure colleagues that our negotiation will be undertaken without prejudice and with full respect to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

This Government will act in these negotiations on behalf of all the territories for whose international relations the UK is responsible. And in negotiating the future relationship between these territories and the EU, the UK Government will seek outcomes that support the territories' security and economic interests, and reflect their unique characteristics.

And as the Prime Minister committed to do at the Second Reading of the Withdrawal Agreement Act, we will keep Parliament fully informed about the negotiations and colleagues will be able to scrutinise our progress in the normal way.

Mr Speaker, this Government is delivering on its manifesto commitments with energy and determination. This government got Brexit done and will use our recovered sovereignty to be a force for good in the world and a fairer nation at home.

We want and we will always seek the best possible relationship with our friends and allies in Europe – but we will always put the welfare of the British people first – and that means ensuring the British people exercise the democratic control over our destiny for which they voted so decisively – that compact with the people is the most important deal of all – and in that spirit, I commend this statement to the House.