

Statement to Parliament: PM Commons statement on European Council: 26 June 2017

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on last week's European Council – and the proposals we are publishing today which, on a reciprocal basis, seek to give reassurance and certainty to EU citizens who have made their homes and lives in our country.

Mr Speaker, this Council followed the formal start of the negotiations for the United Kingdom's departure from the EU, as well as marking the first anniversary of the referendum that led to that decision.

In that referendum, the British people chose to take back control of our laws, our money and our borders; to restore supremacy to this Parliament and to reclaim our sense of national self-determination. And this government will fulfil the democratic will of the British people.

But, Mr Speaker, the referendum was not a vote to turn our backs on our friends and neighbours.

Indeed, as we become ever more internationalist in our outlook, and as we build the global Britain we want to see, we will continue to be reliable partners, willing allies and close friends with all the member states of the European Union.

We want to work with one another to make sure we are all safer, more secure and more prosperous through our continued friendship.

We want to buy each other's goods and services and trade as freely as possible.

And we will continue to celebrate and defend the liberal democratic values that we share – and to project those values that are the foundation of our freedoms and our way of life.

In short, we want to build what I have described as a new, deep and special partnership between a confident, self-governing global Britain and all our friends and allies in the European Union.

Mr Speaker, that is the positive and constructive spirit in which my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union began the formal negotiations last week – and it is the same spirit in which the United Kingdom made a full contribution to all the issues at this Council – including on security, migration, climate change and trade.

Security

On security, I thanked our European partners for their condolences and for

their resolve in standing with us following the appalling terrorist attacks that the UK has suffered in recent weeks.

Those attacks have seen citizens from across Europe tragically killed and injured. But they have also seen our citizens standing together in some of the most inspiring ways.

At London Bridge we saw a Spanish banker tragically killed as he rushed to the aid of a woman being attacked. And we saw a Romanian baker fighting off the terrorists and giving shelter to Londoners in his bakery. These moments of heroism show how – far from dividing us – such attacks on our way of life will only ever serve to strengthen our shared unity and resolve.

But Mr Speaker, these attacks also show that we need to respond to a new trend in the threat we face, as terrorism breeds terrorism and perpetrators are inspired to attack by copying one another using the crudest of means.

So building on the bi-lateral agreement I reached with President Macron earlier this month, at this Council I argued that we must come together to defeat the hateful and extremist ideologies that inspire these attacks. And to stop the internet being used as a safe space for extremists.

When one third of all links to Daesh propaganda are shared within the first hour of release, it is not enough for technology companies to respond reactively to extremist content on their platforms.

So the Council agreed to put pressure on these companies to do more to remove this content automatically and also to ensure that law enforcement agencies can access encrypted data.

This was a significant step forward. And we will continue to work together with our European partners to combat this evil, to defend our values, and to keep our citizens safe.

Migration, trade and climate change

Turning to other issues, on migration the Council recommitted to the comprehensive approach that the UK has advocated, dealing with the drivers of migration while also doing more to stem the flow.

And at this Summit, I confirmed a new UK commitment of £75 million to meet urgent humanitarian needs in the Central Mediterranean, while also facilitating voluntary returns of migrants making these treacherous journeys.

On trade, as the UK leaves the European Union we will be forging trade deals around the world with old friends and new allies alike. But this will not undermine the EU's trade agenda; it is not even in competition with it.

So for as long as we remain part of the EU, we will continue to press for an ambitious trade agenda that can deliver jobs and growth across the continent. And that is what I did at this Council, where there was a particular focus on the work towards deals with Japan, Mexico and the Mercosur bloc of South American countries.

And on climate change, the Council reaffirmed the commitment of all member states to fully implement the Paris Agreement.

The UK has already reaffirmed its own commitment and I have expressed my disappointment to President Trump that he has taken a different decision.

We will continue to make the case to our American allies to think again.

Citizens' Rights

Mr Speaker, turning to citizens' rights, EU citizens make an invaluable contribution to our United Kingdom – to our economy, our public services and our everyday lives. They are an integral part of the economic, cultural and social fabric of our country and I have always been clear that I want to protect their rights.

That is why I initially sought an agreement on this before we triggered Article 50. And it is why I am making it an immediate priority at the beginning of the negotiations.

But Mr Speaker, that agreement must be reciprocal, because we must protect the rights of UK citizens living in EU member states too.

At the Council I set out some of the principles that I believe should underlie that reciprocal agreement – and there was a very positive response from individual leaders and a strong sense of mutual goodwill in trying to reach such an agreement as soon as possible.

So today, we are publishing detailed proposals to do exactly that.

And let me set out the key points for the House.

First, we want certainty. I know there has been some anxiety about what would happen to EU citizens at the point we leave the European Union.

Today I want to put that anxiety to rest. I want to completely reassure people that, under these plans, no EU citizen currently in the UK lawfully will be asked to leave at the point the UK leaves the EU. We want you to stay.

Second, any EU citizen in the UK with five years' continuous residence – at a specified cut-off date – will be granted settled status. They will be treated as if they were UK citizens for healthcare, education, benefits and pensions. While any EU citizens with less than five years' residence – who have arrived before the specified cut-off date – will be able to stay until they have the five years' residence to apply for UK settled status.

Third, the specified cut-off date will be the subject of discussions – but it will be no earlier than the date we triggered Article 50 and no later than the date we leave the EU. Fourth, no families will be split up. Family dependents who join a qualifying EU citizen here before the UK's exit will be able to apply for settled status after five years.

And after the UK has left the European Union, EU citizens with settled status will be able to bring family members from overseas on the same terms as British nationals.

Fifth, there will be no cliff-edge. There will be a grace period of up to two years to allow people to regularise their status. While those EU citizens who arrived in the UK after the specified cut-off date will be allowed to remain in the UK for at least a temporary period and may still become eligible to settle permanently.

Sixth, the system of registration that citizens go through will be as streamlined and light touch as possible and we intend to remove some of the technical requirements currently needed to obtain permanent residence under EU rules.

For example, we will not require anyone to demonstrate that they have held comprehensive sickness insurance.

Seventh, we expect this offer to be extended on a reciprocal basis to nationals of Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

And the reciprocal agreement on citizens' rights will apply to the entire United Kingdom and Gibraltar.

Eighth, this is all without prejudice to the Common Travel Area arrangements that exist between the UK and Ireland. We will preserve the freedoms that UK and Irish nationals currently enjoy in each others' state. And Irish citizens will not need to apply for permanent residence to protect these entitlements.

Finally, the UK will continue to export and uprate the UK State Pension and provide associated healthcare cover within the EU. We will continue to protect the export of other benefits and associated healthcare cover, where the individual is in receipt of those benefits on the specified cut-off date. And subject to negotiations we want to continue participating in the European Health Insurance Card scheme, so that UK card holders could continue to benefit from free or reduced cost healthcare while on a temporary stay in the EU and vice versa for EU card holders visiting the UK.

Mr Speaker, this is a fair and serious offer. Our obligations in the Withdrawal Treaty with the EU will be binding on the UK as a matter of international law. And we will incorporate commitments into UK law guaranteeing that we will stand firmly by our part of the deal.

So our offer will give those three million EU citizens in the UK certainty about the future of their lives. And a reciprocal agreement will provide the same certainty for the more than one million UK citizens who are living in the European Union.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, one year on from that momentous decision to leave the European Union, let us remember what we are seeking to achieve with these negotiations.

We are withdrawing from a system of treaties and bureaucracy that does not work for us. But we are not withdrawing from the values and solidarity that we share with our European neighbours. As a confident, outward-looking and self-governing nation, we know that it is not just our past that is entwined in the fortunes of our friends and neighbours.

It is our future too.

That is why we want this new, deep and special partnership.

And it is why we approach these negotiations with optimism.

Because a good deal for Britain and a good deal for Europe are not competing alternatives.

They are the best single path to a brighter future for all our children and grandchildren.

That, I believe, is the future the British people voted for.

And that is the future I want us to secure.

And I commend this Statement to the House.