

Statement to Parliament: PM Commons

statement on European Council: 18

December 2017

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on last week's European Council.

Before turning to the progress on our negotiations to leave the EU, let me briefly cover the discussions on Russia, Jerusalem, migration and education.

In each case the UK made a substantive contribution – both as a current member of the EU and in the spirit of the new, deep and special partnership we want to build with our European neighbours.

Russia

Mr Speaker, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea was the first time since the Second World War that one sovereign nation has forcibly taken territory from another in Europe.

Since then human rights have worsened; Russia has fomented conflict in the Donbas and the peace process in Ukraine has stalled.

As I said at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, the UK will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and to work with our allies to do likewise – both now and after we have left the EU.

So we were at the forefront of the original call for EU sanctions. And at this Council we agreed to extend those sanctions for a further six months.

Jerusalem

On Jerusalem, I made it clear that we disagree with the United States' decision to move its embassy and recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital before a final status agreement. And like our EU partners, we will not be following suit.

But it is vital that we continue to work with the United States to encourage them to bring forward proposals that will reenergise the peace process.

And this must be based around support for a two state solution – and an acknowledgement that the final status of Jerusalem must be subject to negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Migration

On migration, when we leave the European Union we will be taking back control of our own borders and laws, so we will be free to decide our own approach independently of the EU.

But as part of the new partnership we want to build, I made it clear at this Council that we will continue to play our full part in working with the EU on this shared challenge.

So we will retain our maritime presence in the Mediterranean for as long as necessary.

We will work with Libyan law enforcement to enhance their capability to tackle people smuggling networks.

And we will continue to address the root causes of the problem by investing for the long term in education, jobs and services – both in countries of origin and transit.

Education

When it comes to education, Mr Speaker, our world-leading universities remain a highly attractive destination for students from across the EU, while UK students also benefit from studying overseas.

UK and EU universities will still want to work together after we leave the EU. And indeed to cooperate with other universities from around the world. We will discuss how to achieve this in the long term as part of the negotiations on our future deep and special partnership.

But in the meantime I was pleased to confirm at this Council that UK students will be able to continue to participate in the Erasmus student exchange programme for at least another three years – until the end of this budget period.

Brexit Negotiations

Turning to Brexit, the European Council formally agreed on Friday that sufficient progress has been made to move on to the second stage of the negotiations.

This is an important step on the road to delivering the smooth and orderly Brexit that people voted for in June last year.

And I want to thank Jean-Claude Juncker for his personal efforts, and Donald Tusk and my fellow leaders for the constructive way they have approached this process.

With Friday's Council, we have now achieved my first priority of a reciprocal agreement on citizens' rights.

EU Citizens living in the UK will have their rights enshrined in UK law and enforced by British courts. And UK citizens living in the EU will also have their rights protected.

Mr Speaker, we needed both and that is what we have got – providing vital reassurance to all these citizens and their families in the run-up to Christmas.

On the financial settlement, I set out the principles for the House last week and the negotiations that have brought this settlement down by a substantial amount.

Based on reasonable assumptions, the settlement is estimated to stand at between £35 billion and £39 billion in current terms.

This is the equivalent of around four years of our current budget contribution, around two of which we expect will be covered by the implementation period.

And it is far removed from some of the figures that had been bandied around.

On Northern Ireland, as I set out in detail for the House last week, we have committed to maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland; to uphold the Belfast Agreement in full; and to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland while upholding the constitutional and economic integrity of the whole United Kingdom.

And we will work closer than ever with all Northern Irish parties and the Irish government as we now enter the second phase of the negotiations.

Mr Speaker, the guidelines published by President Tusk on Friday point to the shared desire of the EU and the UK to make rapid progress on an implementation period, with formal talks beginning very soon.

This will help give certainty to employers and families that we are going to deliver a smooth Brexit.

As I proposed in Florence, during this strictly time-limited implementation period which we will now begin to negotiate, we would not be in the Single Market or the Customs Union, as we will have left the European Union. But we would propose that our access to one another's markets would continue as now, while we prepare and implement the new processes and new systems that will underpin our future partnership.

During this period we intend to register new arrivals from the EU as preparation for our future immigration system. And we will prepare for our future independent trade policy by negotiating – and where possible signing – trade deals with third countries, which could come into force after the conclusion of the implementation period.

Finally, the Council also confirmed on Friday that discussions will now begin on trade and the future security partnership.

I set out the framework for our approach to these discussions in my speeches at Lancaster House and in Florence.

We will now work with our European partners with ambition and creativity to develop the details of a partnership that I firmly believe will be in the best interests of both the UK and the EU.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, since my Lancaster House speech in January we have triggered Article 50 and begun and closed negotiations on the first phase.

We have done what many said could not be done – demonstrating what can be achieved with commitment and perseverance on both sides.

And I will not be derailed from delivering the democratic will of the British people.

We are well on our way to delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit.

That is good news for those who voted leave, who were worried the negotiations were so complicated it was never going to happen.

And it is good news for those who voted remain, who were worried that we might leave without being able to reach an agreement.

We will now move on with building a bold new economic relationship – which together with the new trade deals we strike across the world – can support generations of new jobs for our people, open up new markets for our exporters and drive new growth for our economy.

We will build a new security relationship that promotes our values in the world and keeps our families safe from threats that increasingly do not recognise geographical boundaries.

And we will bring our country together – stronger, fairer, and once again back in control of our borders, our money and our laws.

Finally, Mr Speaker, let me say this.

We are dealing with questions of great significance to our country's future, so it is natural that there are many strongly held views on all sides of this Chamber.

And it is right and proper that we should debate them – and do so with all the passion and conviction that makes our democracy what it is.

But there can never be a place for the threats of violence and intimidation against some Members that we have seen in recent days.

Our politics must be better than that.

And on that note, I commend this Statement to the House.

News story: Tyne and Wear man fined for waste offences

Jonathan Patrick Finn of Flaxtead Grange, Sunderland Road, Newbottle, was charged with illegally storing and treating mixed waste when he appeared before South Tyneside Magistrates' Court on 12 December 2017.

He admitted the charges brought by the Environment Agency and was handed a £200 fine with £1,530 costs. The court heard how Finn leased a dead end area of land adjacent to the railway line on the north side of Sheepfolds Road, Sunderland, in January 2016.

The land had previously been fly tipped and Finn was offered six months' rent free and £3,000 in return for lawfully disposing of the waste. Instead, Finn added to it.

Between 4 and 8 January 2016, CCTV captured a red flat back lorry laden with waste approaching the site. Footage then shows the lorry, owned by Finn's father and being used by Finn at the time, leaving empty a short time later. On 4 January a fire was also photographed on the site.

When Environment Agency officers visited the site on 2 February 2016 they saw around five tonnes of waste, including construction waste, plastics and timber on the road outside. Inside they saw large amounts of mixed waste including household waste, sofas and plastics.

The court heard that Environment Agency officers visited the site twice more between 23 February and 24 March 2016, each time reporting an increase in waste.

Further photographic evidence taken during this time shows four loads of waste deposited on the back of a lorry registered in Finn's name.

In May 2016, the land owner was given four weeks to clear the waste after Environment Officers were informed that Finn had abandoned the site.

On a subsequent visit they discovered that the waste was being cleared to a site at the Pallion Industrial Estate in Sunderland owned by Finn's father, John Finn, who later confirmed that some of the waste had come from the Sheepfolds Road site.

Finn attended an interview on 17 October 2016 during which he admitted to burning waste and operating a waste recycling business without a permit.

Rachael Caldwell from the Environment Agency said:

Environmental laws are there to protect communities and the environment from pollution.

Anyone who operates outside of these laws is not only breaking them but is more likely to commit greater harm, which is why we will pursue them and, where repeated or significant breaches are found, we will prosecute.

A trial involving another defendant allegedly linked to the illegal storing and treatment of waste on the site is set to take place next year.

Press release: New flood scheme in Rugeley officially opened

Members of the Environment Agency, Cannock Chase District Council, the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Rugeley Town Council, Staffordshire County Council and the Trent Regional Flood & Coastal Committee visited Rugeley today (Monday 18 December) to mark the completion of the project.

The newly completed Rugeley flood scheme, which was delivered by the Environment Agency, will help to reduce the risk of flooding from the Rising Brook for 114 residential and 159 commercial properties. It also forms an integral part of Cannock Chase District Council's plans to regenerate parts of the town centre.

Work on the project, which started in December 2016, saw construction of a 350m long embankment, which is 4m high at its highest point, on Hagley playing fields. This embankment has created a flood storage area which will store water from the Rising Brook during times of heavy rainfall and then slowly release it back into the watercourse when levels no longer pose a flood risk.

Mark Swain from the Environment Agency said:

This scheme is fantastic news for the people of Rugeley as it will help reduce the risk of flooding to a significant number of residential properties and businesses. Not only that but it is an important step in unlocking Rugeley's potential for future investment, regeneration and growth, something which would be challenging if the town remained at risk of serious flooding.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP chairman David Frost CBE said:

This impressive project is very good news for Rugeley, protecting town centre homes and businesses from flooding and making the town

a better place to live, work and visit.

This scheme means businesses will have a secure foundation when they make plans to expand, without the risk of their hard work literally being washed away. It is also creating an attractive green space for local people to enjoy.

Cllr John Kraujalis Corporate Improvement Portfolio Leader for Cannock Chase Council said:

This scheme is an excellent example of true partnership working in action. The improvements will provide protection and peace of mind to residents and commercial businesses alike that were at risk from flooding from the Rising Brook. The Environment Agency has also successfully procured and delivered a replacement footbridge on behalf of the Council which became unstable a number of years ago and was in desperate need of repair.

Gordon Alcott Economic Development & Planning Portfolio Leader for Cannock Chase Council said:

The works that have been carried out will unlock new development opportunities in Rugeley that have previously been constrained by the flood risk. The Council have already received a planning application for industrial units which could create approximately 60 jobs in the area that would have been affected by flooding prior to this work being carried out.

The scheme has been developed in partnership with Cannock Chase District Council and Staffordshire County Council, and funded by Government Flood Defence Grant in Aid, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP and the Trent Flood and Coastal Committee.

[News story: People smuggler from Newport jailed for 5 years](#)

Adriano Bettoja-Allen, a British national aged 37, was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court on Thursday 14 December after pleading guilty to 2 offences of assisting illegal immigration which happened on 2 October and 9 October 2016 at Calais and Coquelles ports.

Sentenced alongside Bettoja-Allen for 1 count of the same offence was 50-year-old Wendy Thomas, also British, who was his co-conspirator in the Coquelles smuggling attempt. She received a jail sentence of 2 years and 9 months having also admitted the offence. Bettoja-Allen's wife Jeanette, aged 49 and from the Philippines, was linked to the Calais incident and was sentenced to 11 months, suspended for 2 years, 150 hours unpaid work, and a curfew. She pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration 3 days into her trial.

The Calais incident was uncovered after the arrest of Dawood Shahbeik at St Pancras International station on 2 October 2016. Shahbeik, a British national, was questioned and had his luggage searched by Border Force after arriving on the Eurostar from Calais. Examination of his mobile phone revealed several suspicious text messages referring to an individual who had been transported to a house in Newport. The luggage search also revealed a damaged Iranian passport and a large amount of cash. Shahbeik was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration, an offence which he later admitted*.

One week after the Calais incident on 9 October, a second people smuggling attempt was identified, this time at the UK juxtaposed controls in Coquelles. On this occasion, Border Force officers stopped and searched a car driven by Wendy Thomas. A large black holdall covered by pillows and a large soft toy was discovered filling the entire boot space. When Thomas was asked what was inside she claimed it contained towels. When an officer unzipped the bag, two women were discovered lying side by side. Both were unresponsive and were taken to hospital for medical attention before being handed to the French authorities.

Officers then opened the rear passenger door and found a man hiding underneath two cushions and quilt spread across the car covering the foot wells. The man subsequently claimed to be an Iranian national and he was handed to the French authorities to be removed from the UK control zone. Thomas was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration.

Both cases were passed to Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation officers.

Analysis of mobile phones belonging to Shahbeik and Thomas found that both of them had been in regular contact with Adriano Bettoja-Allen.

Bettoja-Allen and his wife Jeanette were both arrested and further enquiries revealed they had travelled through Calais on 2 October having earlier met up with Shahbeik in Dunkirk. When questioned about the text messages exchanged with Shahbeik the pair initially claimed that they referred to a soft toy which they had carried back to the UK on his behalf.

Checks also confirmed Thomas and Adriano Bettoja-Allen had travelled in separate vehicles from Folkestone to Coquelles on the same Eurotunnel train on 8 October. Bettoja-Allen returned to the UK alone the next day less than 2 hours after Thomas had been stopped by Border Force. Financial checks also confirmed a large cash deposit into Thomas' bank account in September 2016.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the CFI team, said:

Adriano Bettoja-Allen was revealed by our investigations to be the common link between what initially appeared to be unconnected incidents. Our investigations showed that far from being opportunistic attempts to undermine the UK's border controls, the offences had been carefully planned. The fact that two women ended up in hospital demonstrates the dangerous lengths people smugglers will go to.

We work closely with Border Force colleagues to rigorously investigate allegations of immigration related criminality. This case should serve as a warning to anyone tempted to get involved with this kind of criminality. We will catch you, and put you before the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit the [crimestoppers](https://www.crimestoppers.co.uk/) website.

*Dawood Shahbiek pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration and was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court in May 2017 to 18 months imprisonment.

Press release: Pig keepers warned not to feed kitchen scraps to pigs due to African swine fever risk

The warning comes after the risk level of African swine fever entering the UK was raised over the summer following spread of the disease in Eastern and Central Europe.

There has never been a case of African swine fever in the UK and it does not affect humans, but it is potentially fatal to pigs. If the disease were to reach the UK it could have a devastating effect on our export market and would also mean the humane culling of pigs on infected premises to prevent further spread.

Keepers are being reminded that it is illegal to feed catering waste of any description or domestic food waste to farm animals in the UK, including pigs kept as pets, as some of the outbreaks of African swine fever in Europe have been attributed to wild boar or domestic pigs consuming contaminated pork or pork products. Viruses such as foot and mouth disease could also be introduced to the UK through food products. This includes food from vegetarian kitchens, as there is still a risk of cross contamination from

products of animal origin such as milk.

Strict hygiene measures are essential in preventing disease – people should not take meat or meat products into areas where pigs are kept and should only eat food in designated areas such as staff rooms or the farm kitchen. Pig keepers, farm staff and anyone in contact with pigs should wash their hands before and after eating or preparing food.

UK Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens said:

The introduction of African swine fever would have an enormous impact on our pig industry. No matter how many pigs you keep, you need to be aware of the potential consequences of feeding waste food to your animals. Not only is it illegal, but you run the risk of spreading disease which could be fatal to your livestock.

You can purchase a range of pig foods from your local agricultural merchant that can be safely fed to your pigs and which is the most reliable way of giving them a balanced diet. Good biosecurity is also essential for minimising disease risk, such as providing dedicated clothing and boots for workers and preventing vehicles which may be contaminated from entering pig premises.

The UK suffered the consequences of pigs being fed illegal waste food in the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001. That outbreak is thought to have originated from pigs being fed catering waste containing the virus, which came from outside the UK. The outbreak resulted in the destruction of more than 10 million cattle and sheep and cost the UK many millions of pounds.

Chief Executive of the National Pig Association, Dr Zoe Davies, said:

The health of our pigs is fundamentally important to our sector. A notifiable disease outbreak would not only needlessly result in the loss of many pigs and annihilate our burgeoning export market, but would significantly impact on countless families, their staff, local businesses and tourism for months. Feeding illegal food waste, however harmless it might seem at the time, is just not worth the risk.

1. This press release is issued jointly by the Animal and Plant Health Agency, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland, The National Pig Association, The British Pig Association, The Pig Veterinary Society, The British Veterinary Association and Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Pork.
2. [EU-wide animal by-product legislation](#) states that feeding farmed animals with catering waste or feed material containing, or derived from, catering waste is illegal. Doing so can result in prosecution.

3. Fruit and vegetable material that originated outside the kitchen, which has never entered the kitchen and which has not come into contact with material of animal origin can be fed, such as vegetables grown in domestic gardens. Some commercial food waste can also be fed if it has undergone the correct animal by-products processing and meets the requirements of the [Feed Hygiene Regulation](#). The safest option if you are in doubt is not to feed any food waste to your animals.
4. [More information about African swine fever and how to spot it](#). Additional information can be found on [AHDB Pork's website](#). If you suspect African swine fever you should notify [the Animal and Plant Health Agency](#) immediately.
5. For more information, contact Defra press office on 020 8225 7618 or out of hours on 0345 051 8486.