

Speech: Intimidation and abuse threaten our democracy: article by Chris Skidmore

Our democracy is held up as an exemplar to countries worldwide. And this leading status has not come without its challenges – hundreds of years of democratic evolution has gone into forming the political system we know today. At the heart of this has always been an idea of fairness, integrity and that every voice matters equally.

That is why I have been so horrified to hear of the abuse and intimidation some of my colleagues, from all parties, faced when running as candidates in the recent election. Abuse has come from all sides, and is not the preserve of any particular party or faction.

It is abhorrent that politicians who are standing up for their local communities have to deal with this level of intimidation and bullying, aimed at silencing those people who stand as the voice of their communities.

We should all be able to work and express our views without fear of retribution. There is a clear difference between legitimate scrutiny of those running for public office by the press, public and political parties, and conduct which is fuelled by hate and personal abuse.

We don't shy away from robust debate, we welcome it – we are politicians after all and debate is what we live for. It's another thread that has run through our democracy and the House demonstrates how this plays a vital part in the formation of laws in our society.

However, in a Westminster Hall debate yesterday on this subject, it was clear that we have cross-party consensus for action on this issue.

At that debate, I announced that the Prime Minister has asked the [Committee for Standards in Public Life](#) to carry out a review. It will consider the recent cases of abuse and intimidation suffered by candidates including racist graffiti, trolling on social media and death threats. The Committee operates independently of government, regulators and politicians, and is well placed to conduct this review.

The Committee will consider what action needs to be taken to ensure the integrity of the democratic process. This is clearly an issue that has the potential to impact on people's wish to stand for office and therefore has a negative impact on standards in public life more broadly.

There is no place for the shocking abuse and accusations that we have seen designed to segregate people for their heritage or their views. We must all stand together on this issue because hate crime of any kind, from wherever it's from is completely unacceptable. It divides communities, destroys lives

and makes us all weaker.

We owe it to our democracy to make clear that intimidation and abuse has no part in our society – not only for candidates who stood at this recent election, but for future generations of men and women considering entering public office and standing for election.

No one must be deterred from playing their part in our democracy, which is why we must seek to end the corrosive effect abuse and intimidation has on actively discouraging future generations from standing as future representatives.

[Press release: Phase one of £150 million Luton Airport transformation completed](#)

- major milestone reached in the £150 million transformation of London Luton Airport (LLA)
- International Trade Secretary welcomes King of Spain to UK-Spain Business Forum at Mansion House – London
- business forum brings together more than 250 senior business delegates from across the UK and Spain to strengthen trade and commercial ties between the 2 countries

Today (Thursday 13 July), International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox welcomed the completion of the first phase of the £150 million transformation of London Luton Airport (LLA), during a [speech at the 'UK-Spain Business Forum'](#) in London.

LLA, which is operated by Spanish company AENA, in partnership with Ardian, a major European investor is currently undergoing the biggest investment programme in its history. When fully complete in 2020, the redevelopment will increase the airport's capacity by 50%, from 12 million to 18 million passengers per year.

Today marks the completion of phase one, following the opening of the new road network, a 1,700 multi-storey car park and a remodelled and expanded bus and coach terminal. Construction is already well underway on phase 2, which will see the airport terminal redesigned to double the size of its immigration, security search and retail and dining area.

The announcement, which falls on the Department for International Trade's first anniversary, complements the billions of pounds in export opportunities already secured by the department, as it strengthens ties with commercial and trading partners across the globe.

Dr Liam Fox, joined by His Majesty the King of Spain at Mansion House, celebrated the strong bilateral trade and business ties between the 2 countries as he outlined key investment projects across the UK.

The UK and Spain are close trading partners. In 2015, bilateral trade between both countries amounted to £41 billion – exports from the UK to Spain were worth £15 billion, and UK imports worth £25 billion from Spain. Around 700 UK companies are investing in Spain, while over 400 Spanish companies are registered in the UK.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

I'm delighted to welcome the ongoing role Spanish investment is playing at Luton Airport, expanding capacity at this key transport connection. Every year millions more people will be able to visit London and the rest of the UK for business ensuring the UK remains Europe's number one destination for Spanish direct foreign investment.

As an international economic department over the past twelve months we've helped secure more foreign direct investment projects than ever before, supported thousands of UK businesses on their export journey, and continue to promote British trade values across the world.

Nick Barton, CEO of London Luton Airport said:

LLA is a fantastic example of the close partnership between the UK and Spain. LLA is the fastest growing major airport in the UK. The support and experience of AENA has been a key contributing factor to our success.

LLA's transformation will provide much-needed air capacity for the South East and improve the experience of the millions of passengers who travel with us each year.

In particular, the forum will highlight:

- The ongoing £150 million transformation of London Luton Airport by Spanish airport operator AENA, in partnership with Ardian, a major European investor. The project, which has just completed its first phase of construction, is forecast to create 10,500 new jobs and contribute an additional £1 billion to the UK economy by 2030.
- Today's announcement by Spanish manufacturer CAF that it is to start building trains and trams at a new factory in South Wales. The company will invest £30 million in the facility near Newport, creating 300 jobs and giving a boost to UK manufacturing and the Welsh economy.

- Spanish infrastructure company Sacyr's decision that it will soon open a new London office close to Victoria Station, which will provide a base for further investment and job creation in the UK.
- The construction of a £26 million factory on a Steel & Alloy Processing site in Oldbury, as Spanish steel producer Gonvarri Steel Services, part of the Gestamp Group, scales up its production capacity in the West Midlands. The project has been supported by the Department for International Trade and will create more jobs in the local area.
- The recent launch of new clinics in the West Midlands and London by Spanish fertility specialists IVI as they invest in their UK expansion, creating jobs and supporting research.

Through [great.gov.uk](https://www.great.gov.uk) the government gives UK businesses access to millions of pounds' worth of potential overseas business, helping them start exporting and an 'export directory' to match UK businesses to worldwide demand.

DIT has helped to secure billions of pounds in export opportunities, and since its creation in July 2016, the department has also supported:

- a trade mission to India which resulted in £1.2 billion worth of business deals
- the largest ever healthcare trade mission to China which saw British organisations sign deals worth more than £250 million
- UK architecture firms to secure a contract worth tens of millions of pounds in UAE

The Department for International Trade is responsible for delivering a new trade policy framework for the UK and promoting British trade and investment across the world, to ensure Britain is firmly at the forefront of global trade and investment.

Contact the DIT Media and Digital Team on 020 7008 3333.

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[Press release: Exiting the EU with certainty](#)

The Government will today take the next step in returning power from Brussels to the UK by introducing the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

Known as the Repeal Bill, it is designed to ensure that the UK exits the EU with maximum certainty, continuity and control. As far as possible, the same rules and laws will apply on the day after exit as on the day before.

This will allow the UK to leave the EU while ensuring that our future laws will be made in London, Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff.

For businesses, workers and consumers across the UK that means they can have confidence that they will not be subject to unexpected changes on the day we leave the EU. It also delivers on our promise to end the supremacy of EU law in the UK.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, said:

This Bill means that we will be able to exit the European Union with maximum certainty, continuity and control. That is what the British people voted for and it is exactly what we will do – ensure that the decisions that affect our lives are taken here in the UK.

It is one of the most significant pieces of legislation that has ever passed through Parliament and is a major milestone in the process of our withdrawal from the European Union.

By working together, in the national interest, we can ensure we have a fully functioning legal system on the day we leave the European Union.

The eyes of the country are on us and I will work with anyone to achieve this goal and shape a new future for our country.

The Repeal Bill is a mechanism to achieve three simple aims:

- Repeal the European Communities Act, remove supremacy of EU law and return control to the UK.
- Convert EU law into UK law where appropriate, giving businesses continuity to operate in the knowledge that nothing has changed overnight, and providing certainty that rights and obligations will not be subject to sudden change.
- Create the necessary temporary powers to correct the laws that no longer operate appropriately so that our legal system continues to function outside the EU.

The Bill sets out how we will prepare our statute book for exit but will not make major changes to policy or legislation beyond what is necessary to ensure the law continues to work properly on day one.

As we exit the EU we want to ensure power sits closer to the people of the UK than ever before. The Bill will ensure that nothing changes for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – they will not lose any of their current decision-making powers.

The Government expects there will be a significant increase in the decision-making power of each devolved administration.

As powers are repatriated from the EU, the Government will ensure they are exercised within the UK in a way that ensures no new barriers to living and doing business within the UK are created. This will protect the UK internal market, ensuring we have the ability to strike the best trade deals around the world, protect our common resources, and fulfil our international obligations.

The Government has already made clear that as the Bill affects the powers of the devolved administrations and legislates in devolved areas, we will seek the consent of the devolved legislatures for the Bill. We would like all parts of the UK to come together in support of this legislation, which is crucial to delivering the outcome of the referendum.

The Bill will also provide the Government with a limited power to implement elements of the withdrawal agreement we expect to reach with the EU before we exit.

We are clear we want a smooth and orderly exit and the Bill is integral to that approach.

To ensure we are prepared for the process of withdrawal from the EU, the Government will also introduce a number of Bills over the course of the next two years including a Customs Bill and an Immigration Bill.

The Repeal Bill means we can make corrections to EU law so that it functions as UK law – this could involve changing a reference to a particular piece of EU law or transferring important functions from EU institutions to UK institutions, depending on the outcome of the negotiations. Allowing corrections to be made quickly will provide certainty for business.

For further information please contact the DExEU Press Office on 0207 276 0432 or view our factsheets [here](#).

The Bill can be found [here](#), along with some explanatory notes [here](#).

[News story: Next steps on the Finance Bill and Making Tax Digital](#)

Three million of the smallest businesses and landlords will be able to move to the new digital system for keeping tax records at a pace that is right for them, Ministers announced today as they set out the next steps for the Finance Bill.

The government has listened to concerns raised by parliamentarians, in particular the Treasury Select Committee, businesses and professional bodies about the pace of change and is taking steps to ensure a smooth transition to

a digital tax system.

Making Tax Digital will help bring the tax system into the 21st century by providing businesses with a modern, streamlined system to keep their tax records and provide information to HMRC. Roll out for Making Tax Digital has been amended to ensure businesses have plenty of time to adapt to the changes.

Mel Stride, Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Paymaster General said:

Businesses agree that digitising the tax system is the right direction of travel. However, many have been worried about the scope and pace of reforms.

We have listened very carefully to their concerns and are making changes so that we can bring the tax system into the digital age in a way that is right for all businesses.

Under the new timetable:

- only businesses with a turnover above the VAT threshold (currently £85,000) will have to keep digital records and only for VAT purposes
- they will only need to do so from 2019
- businesses will not be asked to keep digital records, or to update HMRC quarterly, for other taxes until at least 2020

Making Tax Digital will be available on a voluntary basis for the smallest businesses, and for other taxes.

This means that businesses and landlords with a turnover below the VAT threshold will be able to choose when to move to the new digital system.

As VAT already requires quarterly returns, no business will need to provide information to HMRC more regularly during this initial phase than they do now.

All businesses and landlords will have at least two years to adapt to the changes before being asked to keep digital records for other taxes.

HMRC are fully committed to supporting businesses in this transition. HMRC has already begun piloting the Making Tax Digital services and will continue to do so, testing the system extensively with businesses. It will start to pilot MTDfB for VAT by the end of this year, starting with small-scale, private testing, followed by a wider, live pilot starting in Spring 2018. This will allow for well over a year of testing before any businesses are mandated to use the system.

Ministers also confirmed today that the Finance Bill will be introduced as soon as possible after the summer recess. This will legislate for all policies that were included in the pre-election Finance Bill, raising over £16 billion across the next five years to fund our vital public services.

The government has also re-confirmed that all policies originally announced to start from April 2017 will be effective from that date.

Further Information

These changes will be legislated for as part of the Finance Bill 2017.

Changes to VAT reporting will come into effect from April 2019. From that date, businesses above the VAT threshold have to provide their VAT information to HMRC through Making Tax Digital software.

Millions of businesses are already banking, paying bills, and interacting with each other and their customers online. Making Tax Digital will help businesses to get their tax bills right the first time and reduce the £8 billion tax gap resulting from avoidable errors.

Press release: 5% decrease in number of scientific procedures on animals

The number of scientific procedures carried out on live animals has decreased by 5% in the last year, according to the [annual statistical report released today](#), Thursday 13 July 2017.

The total number of procedures decreased to 3.94 million from 4.14 million, a 206,000 reduction compared with 2015.

The number of experiments rose to a peak of 5.61 million in 1971, followed by a steady fall to 2.62 million procedures overall in 2001. Since then, the number of procedures has shown a general increase, predominantly due to the advent of gene technology and the breeding and use of genetically altered animals, but in recent years has remained around 4 million.

Of the 2.02 million experimental procedures that took place in 2016, 5.6 % (114,000) were assessed as severe procedures compared to 5.9 % (123,000) in 2015.

Of the 1.91 million procedures that took place in 2016 involving the creation/breeding of genetically altered animals that were not used in further procedures, 2 % (40,000) were assessed as severe, compared to 3 % (62,000) in 2015.

A Home Office spokesperson said:

The UK has one of the most comprehensive animal welfare systems in the world and we are completely committed to the proper regulation of the use of animals in scientific research.

This research helps us to ensure that medicines are safe to use and to find treatments for cancer and other diseases, among a range of other benefits.

Our legislation provides a rigorous regulatory system that ensures animal research and testing is carried out only where no practicable alternative exists and under controls which keep suffering to an absolute minimum.