

Prime Minister's statement on EU negotiations: 24 December 2020

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It is four and a half years since the British people voted to take back control of their money, their borders, their laws, and their waters and to leave the European Union.

And earlier this year we fulfilled that promise and we left on Jan 31 with that oven-ready deal.

Since that time we have been getting on with our agenda.

Enacting the points based immigration system that you voted for and that will come into force on Jan 1.

And doing free trade deals with 58 countries around the world.

And preparing the new relationship with the EU.

And there have been plenty of people who have told us that the challenges of the Covid pandemic have made this work impossible.

And that we should extend the transition period.

And incur yet more delay.

And I rejected that approach precisely because beating Covid is our number one national priority and I wanted to end any extra uncertainty and to give this country the best possible chance of bouncing back strongly next year.

And so I am very pleased that this afternoon that we have completed the biggest trade deal yet, worth £660 billion.

A comprehensive Canada style free trade deal between the UK and the EU, a deal that will protect jobs across this country.

A deal that will allow UK goods and components to be sold without tariffs and without quotas in the EU market.

A deal which will if anything should allow our companies and our exporters to do even more business with our European friends.

And yet which achieves something that the people of this country instinctively knew was doable.

But which they were told was impossible.

We have taken back control of laws and our destiny.

We have taken back control of every jot and tittle of our regulation.

In a way that is complete and unfettered.

From Jan 1 we are outside the customs union, and outside the single market.

British laws will be made solely by the British Parliament.

Interpreted by UK judges sitting in UK courts.

And the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will come to an end.

We will be able to set our own standards, to innovate in the way that we want, to originate new frameworks for the sectors in which this country leads the world, from biosciences to financial services, artificial intelligence and beyond.

We will be able to decide how and where we are going to stimulate new jobs and new hope.

With freeports and new green industrial zones.

We will be able to cherish our landscape and our environment in the way we choose.

Backing our farmers and backing British food and agricultural production.

And for the first time since 1973 we will be an independent coastal state with full control of our waters with the UK's share of fish in our waters rising substantially from roughly half today to closer to 2/3 in five and a half years' time after which there is no theoretical limit beyond those placed by science or conservation on the quantity of our own fish that we can fish in our waters.

And to get ready for that moment those fishing communities we will be helped with a big £100m programme to modernise their fleets and the fish processing industry.

And I want to stress that although of course the arguments with our European friends and partners were sometimes fierce this is, I believe a good deal for the whole of Europe and for our friends and partners as well.

Because it will not be a bad thing for the EU to have a prosperous and dynamic and contented UK on your doorstep.

And it will be a good thing – it will drive jobs and prosperity across the whole continent.

And I don't think it will be a bad thing if we in the UK do things differently, or a take a different approach to legislation.

Because in so many ways our basic goals are the same.

And in the context of this giant free trade zone that we're jointly creating

the stimulus of regulatory competition will I think benefit us both.

And if one side believes it is somehow being unfairly undercut by the other, then subject to independent third party arbitration and provided the measures are proportionate, we can either of us decide – as sovereign equals – to protect our consumers.

But this treaty explicitly envisages that such action should only happen infrequently and the concepts of uniformity and harmonisation are banished in favour of mutual respect and mutual recognition and free trade.

And for squaring that circle, for finding the philosopher's stone that's enabled us to do this I want to thank President von der Leyen of the European Commission and our brilliant negotiators led by Lord Frost and Michel Barnier, on the EU side Stephanie Rousseau as well as Oliver Lewis, Tim Barrow, Lindsay Appleby and many others.

Their work will be available for scrutiny, followed by a parliamentary vote I hope on Dec 30.

This agreement, this deal above all means certainty.

It means certainty for the aviation industry and the hauliers who have suffered so much in the Covid pandemic.

It means certainty for the police and the border forces and the security services and all those that we rely on across Europe to keep us safe.

It means certainty for our scientists who will be able to continue to work together on great collective projects.

Because although we want the UK to be a science superpower, we also want to be a collaborative science superpower.

And above all it means certainty for business from financial services to our world-leading manufacturers – our car industry – certainty for those working in high skilled jobs in firms and factories across the whole country.

Because there will be no palisade of tariffs on Jan 1.

And there will be no non-tariff barriers to trade.

And instead there will be a giant free trade zone of which we will at once be a member.

And at the same time be able to do our own free trade deals as one UK, whole and entire, England, NI, Scotland and Wales together.

And I should stress this deal was done by a huge negotiating team from every part of the UK, and it will benefit every part of our United Kingdom, helping to unite and level up across the country.

And so I say again directly to our EU friends and partners, I think this deal

means a new stability and a new certainty in what has sometimes been a fractious and difficult relationship.

We will be your friend, your ally, your supporter and indeed – never let it be forgotten – your number one market.

Because although we have left the EU this country will remain culturally, emotionally, historically, strategically and geologically attached to Europe, not least through the four million EU nationals who have requested to settle in the UK over the last four years and who make an enormous contribution to our country and to our lives.

And I say to all of you at home.

At the end of this toughest of years.

That our focus in the weeks ahead is of course on defeating the pandemic.

And on beating coronavirus and rebuilding our economy.

And delivering jobs across the country.

And I am utterly confident that we can and will do it.

By today we have vaccinated almost 800,000 people and we have also today resolved a question that has bedevilled our politics for decades.

And it is up to us all together.

As a newly and truly independent nation.

To realise the immensity of this moment and to make the most of it.

Happy Christmas to you all.

That's the good news from Brussels – now for the sprouts.

Scottish Secretary welcomes UK's historic deal with EU

News story

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack comments on the UK and EU today reaching a deal on their future relationship



Commenting on today's announcement of the UK and EU today reaching a deal, Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

The UK's deal with the EU is great news for Scotland's businesses. There are huge opportunities ahead – not just with this exceptional access to the EU market, but also in new markets right around the world.

We have an agreement on fisheries which will ensure that our fishermen, and our coastal communities, will flourish outside of the EU's unfair Common Fisheries Policy. The UK will once more be a sovereign coastal state.

The deal protects famous Scottish products such as whisky, Arbroath Smokies and Orkney cheddar.

People in Scotland will benefit from a wide range of social security and healthcare rights while travelling, working and living in the EU.

Now, Scottish businesses need to get ready. The UK Government has been preparing intensively, and working with businesses, and that will continue. The Scottish Government also needs to do its bit and take action in devolved areas – we have given the Scottish Government nearly £200 million to prepare for Brexit.

The United Kingdom will always be a welcoming, outwards-facing nation. Our European neighbours are our friends, and that will not change. EU citizens will continue to be an important part of many of Scotland's communities. This is a historic moment for us all. There are enormous opportunities ahead of us, and we all need to make the most of them.

UK and Moldova sign Strategic Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The Agreement strengthens the trading relationship between the UK and Moldova, worth £395m in 2019, by securing continued preferential access and paving the way for increased trade in future. The trading relationship grew by 77% between 2015 and 2019.

The preferential terms secured by this Agreement will enable British businesses to trade as they do today after the UK's Transition Period with the European Union and provide certainty to consumers in both countries. Top UK imports from Moldova in 2019 include items like clothes, beverages and fruit and vegetables.

The Agreement also sets out the UK and Moldova's ambitions for our future relationship including the strengthening of our political, economic, security and cultural ties. As part of the Agreement, the UK recognises and supports Moldova's commitment to an ambitious programme of reforms and its political, economic and legal accomplishments.

FCDO Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton said:

I welcome the signing of the UK-Moldova Strategic Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which underlines our close ties and our shared ambitions for a deeper trade, political and security relationship. This Agreement will support cooperation in protecting the environment, promoting economic and governance reforms, tackling climate change and standing up for human rights.

DIT Minister Ranil Jayawardena said:

Today's agreement provides stability to the trade between Britain and Moldova and allows businesses to continue with confidence. It creates a firm foundation for even more trade and investment in the future too. We look forward to a continued relationship with Moldova.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Moldova Steven Fisher signed the agreement today (24 December) with Moldovan Foreign Minister Aureliu Ciocoi in Chisinau.

Her Majesty's Ambassador Steven Fisher said:

I am honoured to sign this important agreement on behalf of the United Kingdom. It lays the foundation for building deeper, broader and stronger relations between our two countries in the years ahead.

The Agreement will promote innovative partnerships between the UK and Moldova, following the example of British company Terravesta and Aberystwyth University who are working with a Moldovan partner to develop a biomass solution for heating homes in Chisinau.

UK companies already established in Moldova include Jaguar Land Rover and GlaxoSmithKline. The British Embassy has supported a number of projects to promote development of the Moldovan private sector, one of which has led to British company Barbour manufacturing luxury products in Moldova. The Agreement is signed at a time when both governments are expanding their trade presence in each other's countries.

Notes to Editors

- The United Kingdom-Republic of Moldova Strategic Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement replicates the effects of the existing EU-Moldova Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) provisions as far as possible.
- This Agreement is designed to take effect when the EU-Moldova AA and DCFTA cease to apply to the United Kingdom, following the end of the Transition Period on 31 December. The agreement will be subject to the domestic parliamentary procedures in both the United Kingdom and Moldova before it is brought into force.
- In under two years, the UK government has secured trade agreements with 61 countries. Total UK trade with these countries was worth £199 billion in 2019.
- This accounts for 97% of the value of trade with non-EU countries that we set out to secure agreements with at the start of the trade continuity programme.
- Since the Transition Period began, we have expanded the ambition of our programme above and beyond this original scope, securing agreements with Japan, Vietnam and Singapore, which together accounted for £53bn of UK trade in 2019.
- We will continue to progress in securing further deals before the end of the Transition Period.
- Source: [ONS UK Trade: All countries, non-seasonally adjusted, April to June 2020](#)

NHS Test and Trace winter performance

holds steady

- 58% increase in the number of positive coronavirus cases detected by NHS Test and Trace compared to the previous week
- 92.6% of contacts of positive cases reached last week, and the proportion of contacts reached within 24 hours increased to 97.5%
- NHS Test and Trace service to remain open every day over Christmas and the New Year

NHS Test and Trace is continuing to improve tracing performance, with a rising number of cases and contacts entering the system. In total, during the week 10 December to 16 December, 389,328 cases and contacts have been reached.

Changes such as improving the contact tracing website, reducing repeat calls to households, and increasing numbers of call handlers have led to increases over past weeks in the proportion of contacts being reached and reached faster. The improvements were made following feedback from the public, our colleagues and our local tracing partners, and have been positively received.

Due to growing demand over the holiday period and the recent emergence of a new and more transmissible strain of coronavirus, the service has prioritised making more tests available so that anyone who needs a test can get a test. This increased demand and supply has resulted in a temporary dip in turnaround times, but tests are available for anyone who needs one.

NHS Test and Trace will be open every day over Christmas and the New Year, providing and processing tests for those who need them and tracing contacts of positive cases. All test sites will remain open, only reducing opening hours and booking slots available on the bank holidays, when demand is expected to be lower.

NHS Test and Trace contact tracers will also continue to work throughout the festive period to ensure there are no delays in contacting close contacts of positive cases and breaking chains of transmissions.

NHS Test and Trace's vastly expanded test site network now has more than 700 test sites, including 400 local test sites, in operation. The median distance travelled for a test just 2.3 miles, compared to 5.1 miles as recently as September. More than 4.9 million tests have been processed in the UK in total since testing began, more than any other comparable European country.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

These figures mark another week of strong performance from our

contact tracing service despite increased demands on NHS Test and Trace. Around 1 in 3 people infected with coronavirus may show no symptoms. Thanks to NHS Test and Trace, more than 3.9 million people have been reached who could have otherwise unknowingly spread this dreadful virus.

The service will continue to work night and day to ensure testing is accessible across the country and this crucial work will not stop over the Christmas period. We have built increased testing capacity ahead of the winter and this will continue in the months ahead.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

As we enter the holiday period, I would urge the public to heed our advice on 'Hands. Face. Space', and not to hesitate to book a test if they have coronavirus symptoms. NHS Test and Trace continues to test record numbers of people and people can have confidence that if they have symptoms and need a test, they can get one.

NHS Test and Trace has developed into one of the largest contact tracing and testing systems anywhere in the world and the COVID-19 contract tracing app we launched in September has now been downloaded more than 20.7 million times.

Thank you to everyone who is working over the holiday period across the country to keep NHS Test and Trace running on Christmas Day and throughout the holiday period. So much effort has been put into developing the service throughout the year and I am hugely grateful to all of those who will be sacrificing time with their loved ones to make sure it is there for those who need it over Christmas and the New Year.

Testing

During the week of 10 December to 16 December, 2,293,012 tests were conducted for Pillars 1 and 2 in the UK.

More than 4.9 million tests have been processed in the UK in total since testing began, more than any other comparable European country.

For this reporting period, 61.0% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 91.8% reported in the previous week. 93.9% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 91.9% the previous week.

The NHS Test and Trace laboratory network will also be processing samples as normal with the same level of capacity, including on bank holidays, to ensure continuity of service.

Testing capacity for those with COVID-19 symptoms has increased 6-fold in 7 months, from 100,000 a day at the end of April to more than 650,000 a day. In this reporting week we can see that, as the demand for tests has increased, particularly in the south east, turnaround times have also increased slightly.

Tracing

139,332 positive cases were transferred to contact tracers between 10 December and 16 December, 88.1% of whom were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 87.5% the previous week.

Between 10 December and 16 December, 287,756 people were identified as recent close contacts, with 96.5% who had provided communication details reached and told to self-isolate. Since Test and Trace launched 83.2% of close contacts for whom contact details were provided have been reached.

Over the past few months our teams have been working incredibly hard to make the contact tracing service as effective as possible and NHS Test and Trace has now reached more than 3.9 million people.

Background information

The [statistics from week 29 of NHS Test and Trace](#) show in the most recent week of operations (10 December to 16 December):

- a total of 2,293,012 tests were conducted for pillars 1 and 2, compared with 2,157,895 the previous week
- the proportion of contacts reached by tracing service remains consistent at 92.6%
- 88.1% of people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 87.5% the previous week
- 96.5% of contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 96.6% the previous week
- 61.0% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 91.8% of tests the previous week (England only)
- 93.9% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 91.9% the previous week
- 34.1% (247,767) of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 59.8% (294,842) the previous week
- 91.1% (518,561) of satellite (care home) tests were received within 3 days, compared with 93.4% (506,793) the previous week
- since NHS Test and Trace launched, over 3.7 million contacts have been identified, and 83.2% of all contacts where communication details were given have been reached and told to self-isolate
- NHS COVID-19 app users in England, who have been instructed to isolate via the app, will be able to claim the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment, providing they meet the eligibility criteria. This comes as Apple revealed that the NHS COVID-19 app was the second most downloaded

free iPhone app on its App Store in the UK this year and has been downloaded more than 20.7 million times

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