

Speech: PM statement on EU negotiations: 11 December 2017

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the negotiations for our departure from the European Union.

On Friday morning the government and the European Commission published a [Joint Report on progress during the first phase](#).

On the basis of this report – and following the discussions I held throughout last week – President Juncker is recommending to the European Council that sufficient progress has now been made to move to the next stage and begin talks on the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

And President Tusk has responded positively by proposing guidelines for the next phase of the negotiations.

I want to pay tribute to my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and our whole negotiating team for their calm and professional approach to these negotiations.

We have argued robustly and clearly for the outcomes we seek.

A fair and reciprocal deal that will guarantee the rights of more than three million EU citizens living in the UK and a million UK nationals living in the EU – so they can carry on living their lives as before.

A fair settlement of the accounts, meeting our rights and obligations as a departing member state – in the spirit of our future partnership.

And a commitment 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.

Let me set out for the House the agreements we have now reached in each of these areas.

Citizen's rights

Mr Speaker, more than 3 million EU citizens make an extraordinary contribution to every part of our economy, our society, our culture and our national life.

And I know that EU Member States similarly value the contribution of the 1 million UK nationals living in their communities.

So from the outset I have made protecting citizens' rights my first priority.

But for these rights to be truly reciprocal, they need to be interpreted

consistently in both the UK and the EU.

The European Union started by wanting all EU citizens' rights to be preserved in the UK by a prolongation of EU law.

They said these rights should not require any UK process to implement them.

And that they should be supervised by the Commission and enforced by the European Court of Justice.

Those proposals were not acceptable.

Mr Speaker, when we leave the European Union our laws will be made and enforced here in Britain not in Luxembourg.

So the EU has accepted that we will incorporate the Withdrawal Agreement into UK law.

And citizens' rights will then be enforced by our courts – where appropriate, paying due regard to relevant ECJ case law, just as they already decide other matters with reference to international law when it's relevant.

In the interests of consistent interpretation of citizens' rights, we have agreed that where existing law is not clear, our courts – and only our courts – will be able to choose to ask the ECJ for an interpretation prior to reaching their own decision.

But this will be a very narrow remit and a very small number of cases.

And unlike now, they will not be obliged to do so. This will be voluntary.

The case itself will always be determined by the UK courts, not the ECJ. And there will also be a sunset clause so, after eight years, even this voluntary mechanism will end.

Mr Speaker, the end point of this process is very clear.

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.

The jurisdiction of the ECJ in the UK is coming to an end.

We are taking control our own laws once again. And that is exactly how it should be.

Financial settlement

Let me turn to the financial settlement.

Following some tough conversations – we have agreed the scope of our commitments and the principles for their valuation.

We will continue to pay our net contributions under the current EU Budget plan. During this time our proposed implementation period will see us continuing to trade on current terms.

And we will pay our fair share of the outstanding commitments and liabilities to which we committed during our membership.

However, this is conditional upon a number of principles we have negotiated over how we will ultimately arrive at a fair valuation of these commitments, which will bring the actual financial settlement down by a substantial amount.

This part of the report we agreed on Friday, like the rest of it, is also subject to the general reservation that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This means we want to see the whole deal now coming together, including the terms of our future deep and special partnership, as I said in Florence.

Mr Speaker, these are the actions of a responsible nation honouring the commitments that it has made to its allies having gone through those commitments line by line as we said we would.

It is a fair settlement for the British taxpayer who will soon see significant savings compared with remaining in the European Union.

It means we will be able to use that money to invest in our priorities at home – such as housing, schools and the NHS.

And it means the days of paying vast sums to the European Union every year are coming to an end.

Northern Ireland

Mr Speaker, our departure from the European Union presents a significant and unique challenge for Northern Ireland and Ireland.

So it is absolutely right that the Joint Report makes clear we will uphold the Belfast Agreement in full. This Agreement, including its subsequent implementation agreements and arrangements, has been critical to the progress made in Northern Ireland over recent decades.

Our commitments to those agreements, the principles that underpin them, the institutions they establish and the rights and opportunities they guarantee, remain steadfast.

Mr Speaker, the Joint Report reaffirms our guarantee that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. So much of daily life in Northern Ireland depends on being able to cross the border freely, so it is right that we ensure no new barriers are put in place.

We have also been absolutely clear that nothing in this process will alter our determination to uphold the constitutional and economic integrity of the

whole United Kingdom. And it was right that we took time last week to strengthen and clarify the Joint Report in this regard, listening to unionists across the country, including the DUP.

On Friday I reinforced this further by making [six principled commitments to Northern Ireland](#).

First, we will always uphold and support Northern Ireland's status as an integral part of the United Kingdom, consistent with the principle of consent.

As our Northern Ireland manifesto at the last election made clear, the government I lead will never be neutral when it comes to expressing our support for the Union.

Second, we will fully protect and maintain Northern Ireland's position within the single market of the United Kingdom. This is by far the most important market for Northern Ireland's goods and services and Northern Ireland will continue to have full and unfettered access to it.

Third, there will be no new borders within the United Kingdom. In addition to no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, we will maintain the Common Travel Area throughout these islands.

Fourth, the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will leave the EU customs union and the EU single market. Nothing in the agreement I have reached alters that fundamental fact.

Fifth, we will uphold the commitments and safeguards set out in the Belfast Agreement regarding North-South Co-operation. This will continue to require cross-community support.

And sixth, the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will no longer be subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

Mr Speaker, as the Joint Report makes clear, our intention is to deliver against these commitments through the new, deep and special partnership that we are going to build with the European Union.

Should this not prove possible, we have also been clear that we will seek specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland.

And because we recognise the concerns felt by either side of the border and we want to guarantee that we will honour the commitments we have made, we have also agreed one further fall back option of last resort.

So if we cannot find specific solutions then the UK will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, economic co-operation across the island of Ireland and the protection of the Belfast Agreement.

The Joint Report clearly sets out that cross community safeguards and consent are required from the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly for distinct arrangements in this scenario. And that in all circumstances Northern Irish businesses must continue to have full and unfettered access to the markets in the rest of the United Kingdom on which they rely.

So, Mr Speaker, there can be no question about our commitment to avoiding barriers both North-South and East-West.

We will continue to work with all Northern Irish parties and the Irish government in the second phase of the talks – and continue to encourage the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive so that Northern Ireland's voice is fully heard throughout this process.

Implementation period

Finally, Mr Speaker, in my Florence speech I proposed an implementation period to give governments, businesses and families the time they need to implement the changes required for our future partnership.

The precise terms of this period will be for discussion in the next phase of negotiations. And I very much welcome President Tusk's recommendation that talks on the implementation period should start immediately and that it should be agreed as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, this is not about a hard or a soft Brexit.

The arrangements we have agreed to reach the second phase of the talks are entirely consistent with the principles and objectives that I set out in my speeches in Florence and at Lancaster House.

I know that some doubted we would reach this stage.

The process ahead will not be easy. The progress so far has required give and take for the UK and the EU to move forwards together. And that is what we have done.

Of course, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

But there is, I believe, a new sense of optimism now in the talks and I fully hope and expect that we will confirm the arrangements I have set out today in the European Council later this week.

This is good news for people who voted Leave, who were worried we were so bogged down in tortuous negotiations it was never going to happen.

And it is good news for people who voted Remain, who were worried we were going to crash out without a deal.

We are going to leave but we are going to do so in a smooth and orderly way,

securing a new deep and special partnership with our friends while taking back control of our borders, money and laws once again.

That is my mission. That is this government's mission.

And on Friday we took a big step towards achieving it.

And I commend this Statement to the House

[News story: Children to be given extra protection online](#)

The new power will be taken as an amendment to the Data Protection Bill, currently before the House of Lords, with cross party support.

The Government's proposals will require the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to produce a statutory code of practice on age-appropriate website design.

The new code will set standards required of websites and app makers on privacy for children under the age of 16. It will also ensure that websites and apps must be designed to make clear what personal data of children is being collected, how it is being used, and how both children and parents can stay in control of this data.

The amendment has the support of Baroness Kidron and Baroness Harding, who have campaigned for many years to protect the rights and safety of children on the internet. The Government has worked closely with campaigners on the new amendment, to secure these rights around the online processing of a child's personal data in the Bill.

Digital Minister Matt Hancock said:

Our Internet Safety Strategy sets out how we want the UK to be the safest place to be online. To do that we strongly support freedom online, while protecting people, and particularly children, from harm. There is growing evidence on the need for protections for children on social media.

This statutory code of practice will require tailored protections to be built into websites and apps for children under 16. This must be done in a way that protects the wonderful freedom and opportunity of the internet, without jeopardising the future free flow of data between the UK and EU.

The amendment will be debated in the House of Lords today (Monday 11 December).

The new code would have the same enforceability as the government's codes on direct marketing and data sharing. It also has a clear link to enforcement provisions already set out in the Bill. The government expects that non-compliance with the code would play a relevant factor in any ICO decision to bring forward enforcement action against websites that do not comply with the Data Protection Bill – including in determining level of fines up to £18 million or 4% of global turnover.

The government will work in close consultation with the Information Commissioner's Office and others to ensure that the code is robust, practical, and meets the development needs of children in relation to gathering, sharing, storing and commoditising of their data.

The amendment builds on a number of protections for children's data already in the Bill. This includes the need to obtain parental consent before processing the data of children under the age of 13, the requirement that consent is informed, as well as other new rights including the right to be forgotten.

In addition, through the [Internet Safety Strategy](#), the Government has the ambition to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online and has announced a range of measures including a social media levy, code of practice and annual transparency reporting.

[Press release: UK to lead call for free trade at WTO's biggest conference](#)

The UK will join the biggest ever conference on trade this week, joining 163 other members of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox will attend the WTO Ministerial Conference in Argentina, the final one the UK will attend as a member of the EU.

UK's trade objectives

During the conference the government will call for an open and inclusive trading system, prioritising progress on digital trade, services and support for SMEs, as well as helping developing countries benefit from trade.

As the UK moves onto trade discussions with the EU, it will continue its work at the WTO as it sets its own independent trade policy.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU it will play a leading role in the WTO, championing trade to be more open and accessible.

At the conference the UK will push for agreements to make it easier for businesses to export digital services and information without costly customs duties and make domestic regulations in other countries more transparent for SMEs. Agreements at the last WTO conference in 2015 led to zero tariffs on £6 billion of annual UK technology exports.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox will also support a joint declaration on women's economic empowerment, agreeing to promote gender inclusive trade initiatives directed at improving women's access to trading opportunities. Research has found that closing the global gender gap could boost the global economy by [\\$12 trillion by 2025](#).

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

As we leave the EU, we will set out an independent trade policy which spreads the benefits of trade among our own businesses and consumers, as well as the world's poorest. As a founding member of the WTO, we are committed to a rules-based trading system and I'll be making the case for that this week.

The case for global open and inclusive trade has never been stronger and as an international economic department, we remain a firm supporter of the WTO and will be one of the world's strongest advocates for further trade liberalisation and modernisation.

Trade and developing countries

The UK will also set out its future role as a world-leading supporter of free trade, as Dr Fox and Trade Minister Greg Hands host meetings with African and Commonwealth trade ministers, to promote a free and fair global trade policy which supports developing countries to trade their way to prosperity.

This will be a central focus when the UK hosts the 52 Commonwealth Heads of Government in London next April.

Trade supporting UK business

Agreements made at the WTO have a real impact on British businesses and consumers. Past agreements have helped spread free trade in services (the UK's largest export), enforce companies' intellectual property rights worldwide and reduce customs burdens.

The latest major agreement, secured after the last WTO conference in 2015, removed tariffs on £1 trillion worth of trade in IT products like computer games consoles, worth £6 billion in UK exports.

The UK has worked hard to push for future WTO agreement on issues like

supporting digital trade and creating more transparency for domestic regulation in member countries. UK digital exports are already worth £50 billion a year and Dr Fox will address global business leaders at the summit on the benefits that digital trade liberalisation can bring to developed and developing countries.

Notes to Editors

- the UK is currently represented at the World Trade Organisation through the EU. However, once it leaves the EU it will become an independent member in its own right, able to negotiate according to its own interests
- according to the WTO, workers at export-focused companies in Western Europe earn 10 to 20% more than the average wage in their country
- the next WTO summit will take place in 2019, after the UK has left the EU. This year's summit is the biggest ever, after Afghanistan joined the WTO in 2016
- at the last WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in 2015, members concluded an agreement to ban export subsidies and similar protectionist measures, as well as an agreement to update the [Information Technology Agreement \(ITA-II\)](#)
- the ITA-II was the largest tariff elimination agreement since the creation of the WTO, resulting in zero tariffs on £1 trillion of global trade in IT equipment and guaranteeing that no tariffs are paid on £6 billion of British technology exports

[News story: UK and Gibraltar continue engagement on Rock's Brexit interests](#)

The fifth meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council (Gibraltar EU Negotiations) took place in London today, with ministers in full agreement that Gibraltar's specific interests must continue to be fully taken into account as the UK exits the EU.

The discussions centred around areas such as financial services, taxation, and the implementation period.

Robin Walker also updated the Deputy Chief Minister on progress in the first phase of negotiations. On Friday the UK Government and EU Commission published a joint report setting out its agreement on citizens' rights, Ireland and Northern Ireland, and the financial settlement.

Speaking after the meeting, Minister for Exiting the European Union Robin Walker said:

Today's meeting was very productive. I outlined our commitment to fully representing Gibraltar's interests in the negotiations, including our firm intention to ensure continued market access from Gibraltar into the UK.

I also updated the Deputy Minister on the progress of the negotiations, outlining the positive agreement we have struck with the European Commission to guarantee citizens' rights – including for frontier workers – ensure there will be no hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and agreement on a fair financial settlement.

The UK Government remains absolutely committed to securing a Brexit deal that works for the entire UK family, including our friends on the Rock.

Deputy Chief Minister of the Government of Gibraltar, Dr. Joseph Garcia said:

The detailed work on Brexit between the UK and Gibraltar Governments continues to progress very well. Working groups have engaged on financial services, on-line gaming, the environment and the border since the last JMC. The first meeting of the transport group is scheduled to take place in Gibraltar this week.

We discussed recent developments in the Brexit negotiations following the end of phase one. We also considered how to make the most of Gibraltar's new opportunities, following our exit from the EU.

[Press release: South Yorkshire historic military bridge makes final journey](#)

The Inglis Bridge, which is believed to be the only known surviving Mark 1 version, has been removed from over a 7m wide watercourse to the north of the M180 in South Yorkshire.

The bridge, which has not been used since the end of the Second World War, was the responsibility of Highways England and will be renovated by the Royal Engineers Association at the army base in Nottingham. A partial segment of the bridge will be sent to the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham, Kent when renovations are completed.

Highways England project manager Russell Mclean said:

This has been a fascinating project to be involved in. We were approached by the Royal Engineers Association earlier this year who were interested in renovating a segment of the bridge for their museum.

We were only too happy to help them with their request although the removal of the bridge did prove to be difficult as the bridge has been there for a long time so we weren't sure how the structure was going to hold when we removed it. Luckily we were able to remove a large enough segment which can now be put proudly on display in the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham, Kent.

The 50 feet bridge was removed by a cradle that was bolted to the roadway of the structure and lifted by a 400 tonne crane. The bridge was then split into 2 so it could be transported to the army base.

Members of the Royal Engineers Association were invited to the removal of the bridge.

Jim Johnstone of Doncaster Royal Engineers Association said:

The members of the Doncaster Branch of the Royal Engineers Association have never been involved in a project of this magnitude. In collaboration with Mr James Brooke, the farmer, who kindly donated the bridge to us we feel that we are saving a piece of Corps history that otherwise would have been lost. From the members of the Branch we must also thank Highways England for the tremendous assistance given in the recovery of the bridge.

Inglis bridges were the first modular bridges (that is a bridge which could be built, used, dismantled and built elsewhere) provided for access across rivers and gaps during the war as they could be constructed in a short space of time and could take a large amount of weight. They were usually assembled by a team of 12 men and a turntable.

Counterweight was attached to the home bank side of the pre-erected structure which was then swung across the river to the far banking area.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.