

Speech: PM's statement on October European Council: 23 October 2017

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

Long after we have left the European Union, the UK will continue to be a strong and committed partner, standing alongside our neighbours and working together to advance our shared values and interests.

This Council provided a further opportunity to demonstrate that ongoing commitment, through discussions that included migration, the digital single market, North Korea and Iran.

And it made important progress in moving towards the new, deep and special partnership with the European Union that we want to see.

Migration

First on migration, the UK is playing its full part.

The Royal Navy has intercepted 172 smuggling boats and saved over 12,000 lives since Operation Sophia began.

While our National Crime Agency is working with Libyan law enforcement, enhancing their capability to tackle the people smuggling and trafficking networks.

At the Council we welcomed the reduction in migrant crossings and the renewed momentum behind the Libyan political process.

But we must also continue to address the root causes driving people across the Sahara and the Mediterranean.

So the UK is also continuing to invest for the long term in education, jobs and services both in countries of origin and transit.

Digital single market

On the digital single market, it is right to keep up the pressure on completing its implementation by the end of 2018.

This will bring new opportunities to British businesses and consumers, contributing to growth and jobs.

At this Council, I also argued that the free flow of data is key to unlocking the potential of Europe's digital trade and we secured conclusions which recognised this.

As the Government set out in a paper over the summer, such arrangements will be an important part of the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

North Korea and Iran

On North Korea, we welcomed the EU sanctions adopted last week and reaffirmed our clear condemnation of North Korea's aggressive and illegal missile and nuclear tests.

We urged all states, including China, to play their part in changing the course Pyongyang is taking.

And on Iran, the Council built on the joint statement made by Chancellor Merkel, President Macron and myself last week, reiterating its firm commitment to the nuclear deal.

This was the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy and a major step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is not diverted for military purposes. That is vitally important for our shared security.

Exit from the EU

Mr Speaker, turning to our negotiations to leave the European Union, I shared the vision I had set out in Florence for a creative and pragmatic approach to a new, deep and special partnership between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

A partnership based on the fundamental beliefs we share – in democracy and the rule of law, but also in free trade, rigorous and fair competition, strong consumer rights, and high regulatory standards.

Both sides have approached these talks with professionalism and a constructive spirit – and we should recognise what has been achieved to date.

Citizens' rights

On citizens' rights, both sides share the same objective of safeguarding the rights of EU nationals living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU.

This has been my first priority from the very beginning of the negotiations – and it remains so.

The negotiations are complicated and deeply technical but in the end they are about people – and I am determined that we will put people first.

EU citizens make an extraordinary contribution to our national life, enriching the economic, social and cultural fabric of our country – and we want them to stay.

I know that EU Member States also value the UK nationals living in their communities and I want them to have their rights protected too.

We are united on the key principles, and while there are a small number of issues that remain outstanding, we are in touching distance of a deal.

This agreement will provide certainty about residence, healthcare, pensions and other benefits.

It will mean that EU citizens who have paid into the UK system – and UK nationals who have paid into the system of an EU27 country – can benefit from what they have put in.

It will enable families who have built their lives together to stay together.

And it will provide guarantees that the rights of those UK nationals currently living in the EU, and EU citizens currently living in the UK, will not diverge over time.

We will also ensure that the implementation of the agreement we reach does not create complicated and bureaucratic hurdles.

So we are developing a streamlined digital process for those applying for settled status in the UK in the future.

This will cost no more than a UK passport. People applying will not have to account for every trip they have taken in and out of the UK and they will no longer have to demonstrate Comprehensive Sickness Insurance.

And there will be a simple process for any EU citizen who holds permanent residence under the old scheme to swap their current status for UK settled status.

To support this, we are setting up a User Group that will include representatives of EU citizens in the UK as well as digital, technical and legal experts.

And we will do everything possible to work closely with EU Member States to ensure their processes are equally streamlined for British nationals living in their countries.

Northern Ireland

We have also made significant progress on Northern Ireland, where it is absolutely imperative that joint work on the peace process is not affected in any way.

The Belfast agreement must be at the heart of our approach and we have clearly agreed that the unique circumstances across the whole of the island of Ireland will require specific solutions.

There will not be any physical infrastructure at the border and we have also developed joint principles to ensure the continuation of the Common Travel Area.

These principles will fully preserve the rights of UK and Irish nationals to

live, work and study across these islands – and protect the associated rights to public services and social security.

No UK or Irish national will need to apply for settled status anywhere in the Common Travel Area at any stage in order to protect their entitlements.

And to provide legal certainty, the joint principles we have developed recognise that the Withdrawal Agreement should formally acknowledge that the UK and Ireland will continue to be able to uphold and develop these bilateral arrangements.

Moving forwards

Mr Speaker, this Council provided an opportunity to assess and reflect on how to make further progress in the negotiations.

My speech in Florence made two important steps which have added a new impetus.

First, I gave two firm commitments on the financial settlement: that the UK will honour commitments we have made during the period of our membership and that none of our EU partners should fear they will need to pay more or receive less over the remainder of the current budget plan as a result of our decision to leave.

As the House would expect, we are going through our potential commitments line by line and that detailed work continues.

And second, I proposed a time-limited implementation period based on current terms, which is in the interest of both the UK and the EU.

At this Council the 27 Member States responded by agreeing to start their preparations for moving negotiations onto trade and the future relationship we want to see.

The Council conclusions call for work to continue with a view to – and I quote – “consolidating the convergence achieved and pursuing negotiations in order to be able to move to the second phase of the negotiations as soon as possible.”

And President Tusk, in his press conference, was clear that the EU’s internal work “will take account of proposals” presented in the Florence speech.

And indeed that this agreement to start preparatory discussions would not be possible without the new momentum given by that speech.

Conclusion

So Mr Speaker, I am ambitious and positive about Britain’s future and these negotiations.

If we are going to take a step forward together it must be on the basis of

joint effort and endeavour between the UK and the EU.

But I believe that by approaching these negotiations in a constructive way – in a spirit of friendship and co-operation – we can and will deliver the best possible outcome that works for all our people.

As Chancellor Merkel said: “We haven’t reached a final agreement, but it’s going to happen.”

Mr Speaker, Chancellor Merkel is right.

We are going to leave the European Union in March 2019, delivering on the democratic will of the British people.

But while we must and will prepare for every eventuality, I am confident that we will do so in a smooth and orderly way and that we will be able to negotiate a new, deep and special partnership between a sovereign United Kingdom and our friends in the European Union.

That is my mission.

That is this Government’s mission.

And I commend this Statement to the House.

News story: UK steps up role as the fight against Daesh evolves

2 Rifles, currently based at Al Asad providing infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical training to the Iraqi Security Forces, will now patrol outside the base perimeter.

The UK is also deploying a further team of British military medical personnel to Al Asad and will extend the deployment of British engineers at the base by six months. A Light Surgical team, made up of RAF medics and personnel from the Army Medical Corps, will be able to provide world leading medical treatment to Coalition forces within the critical “Golden Hour” after being wounded.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

The fight against Daesh’s reign of terror is not over and as the nature of the Coalition campaign changes, the role we play must adapt too. By training Iraq forces we are helping with the long-term stability of the country and our own security here at home.

The campaign to defeat Daesh in Iraq has entered its final phase following the liberation of Mosul, Hawija and the Ninewah Province from its barbaric rule. Iraqi Security Forces are now advancing across Anbar Province, clearing Daesh positions in the Euphrates River Valley.

Medical support to operations is a top priority for the Coalition. Learning from previous operations, such as the world leading trauma care developed at Camp Bastion's hospital, the UK medical personnel will ensure Coalition forces receive the highest standard of treatment if required.

Over 600 British soldiers are on the ground in Iraq, helping to train that country's forces. UK troops have so far helped train over 58,000 Iraqi Security Forces in battle-winning infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical skills. In addition to personnel on the ground in Iraq, RAF aircraft have carried out over 1,600 strikes against Daesh. The UK's commitment from all three Services to the fight against Daesh across the region now numbers just over 1,400 military personnel.

[News story: Change of UK Special Envoy to Syria](#)

Dr Martin Longden has been appointed as the UK's Special Envoy to Syria.

[Dr Martin Longden](#) has been appointed as the UK's Special Envoy to Syria in succession to Mr Gareth Bayley who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment.

Dr Longden will take up his appointment at the end of October 2017 and combine the new role with his current role as Head of Near East Department. Prior to his current role, he was Deputy Ambassador, British Embassy Kabul.

Speaking on the appointment, Dr Longden said:

I look forward to representing the UK to drive forward a holistic approach to Syria and the region, while maintaining strong links with the Syrian opposition.

The only lasting solution is a political transition that can protect the rights of all Syrians, unite the country and end the conflict. The UK will continue to play a key role in the international efforts to bring peace to all Syrians.

Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said:

The UK is working tirelessly to bring a peaceful solution to the Syria conflict. There can be no military solution to this tragedy, and neither Syria nor the region can be properly stabilised until we see a genuine transition to a new government in Damascus.

Martin's extensive diplomatic experience will ensure he is well prepared to continue our efforts towards a political solution in Syria.

Further information

[News story: HMRC to recruit a Second Permanent Secretary](#)

Decision made following the announcement of Edward Troup's retirement at the end of 2017

The appointment has Cabinet Office and Treasury approval and will be advertised across the Civil Service shortly.

HMRC Chief Executive, Jon Thompson, said:

Over the course of the department's history, there has always been a partnership at HMRC's helm, with a specific focus on tax as well as on the organisation itself. I propose continuing this tradition with the appointment of a Second Permanent Secretary to lead our work on tax, fiscal events and to be the Tax Assurance Commissioner. They will also lead on Brexit, which will continue to grow in importance over the next few years.

Due to the level of tax policy expertise and knowledge of the UK tax system required, we will be limiting our search to existing civil servants only, and hope to announce the new appointment before the end of this year.

[Press release: UK leads international](#)

support for Rohingya crisis at landmark conference

The UK has increased its own support for innocent families who have been forced to flee relentless violence in Burma and make the treacherous journey to Bangladesh to find refuge. This is an increase from £35 million to £47 million (US \$63 million) committed since the end of August, including £5 million to match the generous donations of the UK public to the Disaster Emergency Committee appeal.

Ahead of the landmark international pledging conference, which took place in Geneva today (Monday 23 October 2017), the UK had given more than a third of the overall money donated by the international community and the International Development Secretary Priti Patel called on other countries to follow the UK's lead and step up their support.

At the conference today countries including Sweden, Australia, Denmark and the UAE, have in total pledged over \$300 million. This reaches over half of the total funding required to meet urgent humanitarian needs as set out in the UN appeal. Countries are continuing to pledge.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The international community has followed the UK's lead and stepped up support which is absolutely vital to save the lives of victims of the world's fastest growing humanitarian crisis.

UK aid is helping hundreds of thousands of people who have lost everything and our further support announced today will relieve the suffering of thousands more.

Ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, starvation and the murder of children have no place in our world. Today's pledges are only just the start, and the world cannot afford to wait as innocent men, women and children continue to lose their lives.

Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mark Field said:

During my recent visits to Burma and Bangladesh, I saw for myself some of the communities which have been so badly damaged by what is happening in Burma.

I am delighted to be in Geneva to announce the UK's latest contribution of £12 million to the Burma crisis response. Alongside the £30 million we provided to meet the urgent humanitarian need, and the £5 million of public donations that the UK matched pound for pound for the Disasters Emergency Committee Appeal, the total

contribution of the UK government is now £47 million.

I hope that the international community will continue to unite with the UK in its efforts, and help bring an end to this terrible humanitarian crisis.

Today's announcement of extra support builds on existing UK aid which is already helping to provide:

- Emergency food to 174,000 people;
- Lifesaving nutritional support to more than 60,000 children under-five and over 21,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- Safe drinking water, emergency latrines and hygiene kits for more than 138,000 people;
- Essential items including soap, cooking utensils and water cans for over 131,000 people;
- Emergency shelter for over 130,000 people and support to make shelters more resilient to rain and heavy winds for 450,000 people as the cyclone season approaches;
- Access to female bathing cubicles and sanitary items for more than 35,000 girls and women;
- Counselling and psychological support for over 10,000 women suffering from the trauma of war and over 2,000 survivors of sexual violence;
- Medical help for over 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely.

With UK aid support in Bangladesh, malnourished children on the brink of death are now able to eat, families who have been forced to live out in the open after their villages were burned are getting shelter and clean drinking water is helping stop the spread of disease.

Our existing work in the region meant that we were already in position to provide life-saving support when the crisis flared – without this, aid would have taken much longer to arrive.

The UK is also leading the charge to reform the humanitarian system, to ensure the international community responds efficiently and effectively to crises, pooling resources together rather than competing and working in isolation.

Notes to Editors:

1. Prior to the conference the UN appeal for the Rohingya crisis was just 24% funded, with over a third of the \$106 million pledged coming from the UK. A total of \$434 million is needed overall.
2. The UK is appalled by the inhumane violence that has taken place in Rakhine State, which has forced nearly 600,000 people to leave everything behind in Burma and make the perilous journey to Bangladesh.

3. The events in Rakhine look like ethnic cleansing. The Burmese authorities need to stop the violence and ensure immediate access into northern Rakhine so that UK aid can provide a lifeline to those still suffering in Rakhine State. Unacceptable intimidation and restrictions on the movement of humanitarian workers must be ended. Burma must work with international partners to put in place the conditions that will allow people to return to their homes safely, with dignity and hope for the future.
4. Recognising the unprecedented scale of the crisis in Bangladesh and Burma, the UK has been a leader in responding – in speed and size – providing an addition £47 million since August to help meet the urgent humanitarian needs of innocent men, women and children who have been forced to flee the relentless violence and atrocities in Burma, and make the treacherous journey to Bangladesh to seek refuge. We are working with international partners including UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR and World Food Programme to deliver this on the ground. The UK is also providing £1m to the Red Cross in Burma, the only organisation that currently has access to Northern Rakhine.
5. Alongside this, the UK Government is matching pound for pound £5 million raised by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Appeal for people fleeing the violence and destruction in Burma, doubling the impact of the public's own donations and ensuring that charities working on the ground can reach even more people in need.