

BCC open letter to PM: Businesses need clarity on Brexit

As Cabinet ministers gather today (Wednesday) to discuss the government's negotiating stance ahead of critical talks on the UK's future relationship with the European Union, Francis Martin, President of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and Adam Marshall, the BCC's Director General, write an open letter to Prime Minister Theresa May, making an urgent appeal for clarity on the government's objectives.

In the letter, the BCC's leaders urge the government to make key choices and deliver a clear statement of intent – so that businesses of all sizes and sectors can make decisions for the future.

The full letter is below:

Dear Prime Minister,

As President and Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, we write today to make an urgent appeal for clarity on Her Majesty's Government's objectives at a critical moment in the UK's negotiations with the European Union.

In Chamber business communities all across the United Kingdom, there are a range of views on the depth and breadth of the UK's future relationship with the EU.

As a consequence, the BCC has refrained from entering into the noisy political debate on the shape of the final settlement in recent weeks. We have instead emphasised the need for answers to the many practical questions businesses now face. Our aim has always been to maximise, not constrain, the government's chances of success as ministers and the civil service work to secure the best possible deal for the UK.

Yet businesses need those elected to govern our country to make choices – and to deliver a clear, unequivocal statement of intent.

The perception amongst businesses on the ground, large and small alike, is one of continued division. Even amongst the many optimistic, future-oriented firms – those who see opportunity in change – patience is wearing thin. Directly-affected companies are poised to activate contingency plans. Many others, worryingly, have simply disengaged.

Clear UK negotiating objectives are crucial to both business and public confidence.

While the BCC has campaigned strongly in favour of a status-quo transition period, to give businesses time to plan for change, this transition must lead to a clear endpoint. There is no room for continued ambiguity as companies

make investment and hiring decisions. The government must set out its plans.

Ends

Notes to editors:

Francis Martin is the elected, non-executive President of the British Chambers of Commerce, and the first in the 158-year-old organisation's history from Northern Ireland. He is a partner and former Managing Partner (2008-2013) of BDO Northern Ireland, a member of the global accountancy and business advisory firm.

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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[BCC: Business and Labour leaders meet to discuss key business issues](#)

Today British Chambers of Commerce Director General Adam Marshall and the heads of four other business groups meet with the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn MP, and senior members of the Shadow Cabinet to discuss the key issues facing businesses across the UK.

At the meeting, set to take place this afternoon (Monday), the BCC will underline the importance of sustained and constructive communication between the Labour Party and business, both at Westminster and across Britain.

BCC Director General Adam Marshall will emphasise the huge contribution businesses of all sizes make to British society and to national prosperity, as well as feedback from business communities across the UK seeking a more positive tone on business issues from Labour, as the major party of opposition.

On Brexit, Marshall will urge opposition leaders to prioritise answers to the many practical questions facing businesses across the UK – and for clarity on Labour’s stance on the UK’s future relationship with the European Union.

At the same time Marshall will remind opposition leaders that even the best possible Brexit deal won’t matter in the longer term if the right conditions aren’t in place for enterprise and growth here in the UK. More attention to domestic economic priorities, including training, digital connectivity, infrastructure and long-term industrial strategy is needed to boost business confidence and investment.

Ahead of the meeting, Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“At a time of great change and uncertainty, the relationship between business and political parties across the spectrum is of critical importance. Business communities across Britain want to see sustained, constructive communication with government and opposition alike, with an honest dialogue about both shared interests and issues where we disagree.

“Businesses tell us they want to hear a more positive tone from Labour’s leadership, and a clearer acknowledgement that companies of all sizes help create good jobs, thriving communities, and economic prosperity.

“At the same time, businesses want to see the parties at Westminster set aside their differences and unite in the national interest on issues like education, workforce training and better infrastructure, where the UK must do more to stay competitive in a changing world. As the UK prepares to leave the EU, it’s time for politicians of all colours to set short-termism aside and come together to fix the foundations for future growth.”

Ends

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BCC: Transition must deliver clarity and certainty for trade

Commenting on the speech by David Davis on a transition period after we leave the European Union, Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“An overwhelming majority of our businesses, large and small, want a standstill transition agreed by the UK and the EU without further delay.

“UK businesses and their European trading partners expect the negotiators to deliver a clear sense of what the future trading relationship will look like, and a sensible transition that gives them both immediate certainty and adequate time to prepare for future changes to the trade rulebook.

“A key transition priority is to ensure that UK exporters and importers maintain the same terms of trade with those countries currently covered by EU free trade agreements, for the length of the transition. The onus will then be on the UK government to secure the benefits of these agreements for the future.”

On the UK’s ability to negotiate new trade deals during a transition period, Marshall added:

“While our businesses want the UK government to explore new and upgraded trading relationships around the world, their most important priority is to secure the significant levels of market access British businesses may lose, rather than the unproven potential of new agreements elsewhere. In the immediate future, effort must not be deflected from guaranteeing the benefits of existing trade deals for a symbolic and rushed ‘quick win’ elsewhere.”

Ends

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[BCC comments on GDP figures for Q4 2017](#)

Commenting on the preliminary UK GDP figures for Q4 2017, published today by the ONS, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“The preliminary estimate of UK GDP growth indicates that the UK economy picked-up pace in the final quarter, with growth at its highest since the second half of 2016. That said, the yearly figure of 1.8% UK GDP growth is below historic trends – a particular disappointment given the rapidly improving global economy.

“Despite the improvement recorded at the end of 2017, UK economic growth is likely to become more sluggish over the coming quarters with household spending, a key determinant of UK growth, likely to remain stifled by falling real wages and weakening consumer confidence.

“Business investment is likely to remain weighed down by Brexit uncertainty and the cost of doing business in the UK. While the outlook for UK exporters is for solid growth this year, the contribution of trade to UK GDP growth is expected to remain limited by similarly solid growth in imports, with little evidence of import substitution despite their rising cost.

“With the UK economy in a more subdued period, more needs done to stimulate economic activity, including addressing the chronic skills shortages, our creaking physical and digital infrastructure and the burden of upfront business costs, that continue to weigh on the UK’s long-term growth prospects.”

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