

Speech: PM statement on European Council: 17 December 2018

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

Before turning to Brexit, let me touch on two significant conclusions from the other business of the Council.

First, we expressed our utmost concern over the escalation we have seen at the Kerch Straits and the Sea of Azov and Russia's continued violations of international law.

We agreed to roll-over economic sanctions against Russia and we stand ready to further strengthen our support, in particular, for the affected areas of Ukraine.

And second, we also agreed to work together on tackling the spread of deliberate, large-scale and systematic disinformation, including as part of hybrid warfare. On this I outlined some of the world-leading work that the UK is doing in this field.

And I was clear that after we have left the European Union, the UK will continue to work closely with our European partners to uphold the international rules based system and to keep all our people safe.

And that is why it is right that our Brexit deal includes the deepest security partnership that has ever been agreed with the EU.

Mr Speaker, at this Council I faithfully and firmly reflected the concerns of this House over the Northern Ireland backstop.

I explained the assurances we had already agreed with the EU were insufficient for this House – and that we had to go further in showing that we never want to use this backstop and, if it is used, it must be a temporary arrangement.

Some of the resulting exchanges at this Council were robust.

But I make no apology for standing up for the interests of this House and the interests of our whole United Kingdom.

In response, the EU 27 published a series of conclusions.

They made clear that it is their – and I quote – “firm determination to work speedily on a subsequent agreement that establishes by 31st December 2020 alternative arrangements, so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.”

The House will forgive me, but I think this bears repeating: “the backstop

will not need to be triggered.”

They underlined that “if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would apply temporarily.”

They said that in this event the EU “would use its best endeavours to negotiate and conclude expeditiously a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop.”

And they gave a new assurance in relation to the Future Partnership with the UK, to make it even less likely that the backstop would ever be needed by stating that the EU “stands ready to embark on preparations immediately after signature of the Withdrawal Agreement to ensure that negotiations can start as soon as possible after the UK’s withdrawal.”

Mr Speaker, in these conclusions, in their statements at the Council and in their private meetings with me, my fellow EU leaders could not have been clearer – they do not want to use this backstop. They want to agree the best possible future relationship with us. There is no plot to keep us in the backstop.

Indeed, President Macron said on Friday – “we can clarify and reassure...the backstop is not our objective, it is not a durable solution and nobody is trying to lock the UK into the backstop.”

As formal conclusions from a European Council, these commitments have legal status and should be welcomed. They go further than the EU has ever done previously in trying to address the concerns of this House.

And of course they sit on top of the commitments that we have already negotiated in relation to the backstop: including...

...ensuring the customs element is UK-wide;

...that both sides are legally committed to using best endeavours to have our new relationship in place before the end of the Implementation Period;

...that if the new relationship isn’t ready we can choose to extend the Implementation Period instead of the backstop coming into force;

...that if the backstop does come in, we can use alternative arrangements, not just the future relationship, to get out of it;

...that the treaty is clear the backstop can only ever be temporary;

...and that there is an explicit termination clause.

But Mr Speaker, I know this House is still deeply uncomfortable about the backstop.

And I understand that. And I want us to go further still in the reassurances we secure.

Discussions with my EU partners – including Presidents Tusk, Juncker and others – have shown that further clarification following the Council's conclusions is in fact possible.

So discussions are continuing to explore further political and legal assurances.

We are also looking closely at new ways of empowering the House of Commons to ensure that any provision for a backstop has democratic legitimacy and to enable the House to place its own obligations on the government to ensure that the backstop cannot be in place indefinitely.

But it is now only just over 14 weeks until the UK leaves the EU. And I know many Members of this House are concerned that we need to take a decision soon.

My Rt Hon Friend, the Leader of the House, will set out business on Thursday in the usual way.

But I can confirm today that we intend to return to the Meaningful Vote debate in the week commencing 7th January and hold the vote the following week.

Mr Speaker, when we have the vote, Members will need to reflect carefully on what is in the best interests of our country.

I know that there are a range of very strongly held personal views on this issue across the House. And I respect all of them.

But expressing our personal views is not what we are here to do.

We asked the British people to take this decision.

472 current Members of this House voted for the Referendum in June 2015, with just 32 voting against.

And the British people responded by instructing us to leave the European Union.

Similarly 438 current Members of this House voted to trigger Article 50, to set the process of our departure in motion, with only 85 of today's Members voting against.

Now we must honour our duty to finish the job.

I know this is not everyone's perfect deal. It is a compromise.

But if we let the perfect be the enemy of the good then we risk leaving the EU with no deal.

Of course we have prepared for no deal, and tomorrow the Cabinet will be discussing the next phase in ensuring we are ready for that scenario.

But let us not risk the jobs, services and security of the people we serve by

turning our backs on an agreement with our neighbours that honours the referendum and provides for a smooth and orderly exit.

Avoiding no deal is only possible if we can reach an agreement or if we abandon Brexit entirely.

And as I said in the debate earlier this month – “do not imagine that if we vote this down, a different deal is going to miraculously appear.”

If you want proof, look at the Conclusions of this Council.

As President Juncker said: “it is the best deal possible and the only deal possible”

And any proposal for the future relationship – whether Norway, Canada, or any other variety that has been mentioned – would require agreeing this Withdrawal Agreement.

The Leader of the Opposition – as well as some others – are trying to pretend they could do otherwise.

This is a fiction.

Finally let us not break faith with the British people by trying to stage another referendum.

Another vote which would do irreparable damage to the integrity of our politics, because it would say to millions who trusted in democracy, that our democracy does not deliver.

Another vote which would likely leave us no further forward than the last.

And another vote which would further divide our country at the very moment we should be working to unite it.

And let us not follow the Leader of the Opposition in thinking about what gives him the best chance of forcing a General Election.

For at this critical moment in our history, we should be thinking not about our party's interests, but about the national interest.

Let us find a way to come together and work together in the national interest to see this Brexit through.

Mr Speaker, I will work tirelessly over these next few weeks to fulfil my responsibility as Prime Minister to find a way forwards.

Over the last two weeks, I have met quite a number of colleagues and I am happy to continue to do so on this important issue so that we can fulfil our responsibilities to the British people.

So together, we can take back control of our borders, laws and money; while protecting the jobs, the security and the integrity of our precious United Kingdom.

So together we can move on to finalising the future relationship with the European Union and the trade deals with the rest of the world that can fuel our prosperity for years to come.

And so together we can get this Brexit done and shift the national focus to our domestic priorities – investing in our NHS, our schools and housing; tackling the injustices that so many still face; and building a country that truly works for everyone.

For these are the ways in which, together, this House will best serve the interests of the British people.

And I commend this Statement to the House.

[News story: Future vehicles powered by low carbon tech: apply for funding](#)

A £20 million funding competition by the [Advanced Propulsion Centre](#) (APC) will invest in business projects that support the design, build and manufacture of zero and low emission vehicles and technologies.

This is the latest in a series of funding competitions. They are delivered in partnership by the APC, Innovate UK and the [Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#).

The competitions support the government's [modern Industrial Strategy](#) under the [future of mobility Grand Challenge](#). This challenge will transform how people, goods and services move around, including more efficient transport networks with dramatically reduced carbon emissions and other pollutants.

A 10-year, £1 billion joint government and industry commitment, the APC exists to accelerate low carbon propulsion technologies in the UK. It aims to make the UK a global centre of excellence for next-generation low carbon vehicle development and production.

Build a long-term UK supply chain

The competition is inviting projects that enhance UK capabilities in low carbon technologies for automotive and create a long-term supply chain.

It is particularly interested in the design, build and manufacture of zero tailpipe emission vehicles. Projects that demonstrate a significant reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, including motors, batteries, power electronics, hybridisation and alternative propulsion systems, are also welcome.

Projects must be in the following areas:

- alternative propulsion systems
- electric machines and power electronics
- energy storage and energy management
- lightweight vehicle and powertrain structures
- thermal propulsion systems

Ultimately, projects should support the growth of next-generation technologies and create more jobs in the UK.

Competition information

- the competition opens on 7 January 2019 and the deadline for applications is at midday on 6 March 2019
- UK-based businesses can lead a project, working in partnership with others, including at least one SME, a vehicle manufacturer or tier 1 supplier
- total costs should range between £5 million and £40 million, with 50% match funded by industry
- projects can last between 18 and 42 months
- the best applications will be invited to interview the week beginning 29 April 2019
- businesses can [register for a briefing event](#) on 10 January 2019 to get advice on applying

[News story: Civil news: tenders open for housing and debt and HPCDS](#)

We are inviting organisations to submit tenders through the e-Tendering system to deliver services from 1 March 2019 for:

Providers are free to tender for either one category of work or both.

Where is this work available?

Housing and debt service contracts are being offered in:

1. Doncaster
2. Dorset
3. Portsmouth and Isle of Wight
4. Calderdale

5. North Yorkshire
6. East Riding of Yorkshire
7. City of Kingston upon Hull
8. Sandwell

Up to 4 HPCDS contracts are being offered in each of the following scheme areas:

1. Bradford, Skipton
2. Scarborough, York
3. Wakefield
4. Walsall

These schemes will be scheduled through rotas.

Housing and debt tender

This tender is non-competitive and is being run under the 2018 Standard Civil Contract.

It is open to both current legal aid contract holders and new entrants. All organisations assessed as being suitable and as meeting the minimum service requirements will be awarded a contract.

Contracts will be offered for an initial period up to 30 August 2021. This is subject to the LAA's rights of early termination and the right to extend.

Housing and Possession Court Duty Scheme tender

This tender is for an exclusive schedule under the 2013 Standard Civil Contract (as amended) for a contingency period in specific courts. It is only open to:

- current civil legal aid providers contracted to deliver housing and debt
- organisations applying through the concurrent housing and debt tender which subsequently go on to hold a 2018 Standard Civil Contract in housing and debt

Contracts will be offered for an initial period up to 30 September 2019. This is subject to the LAA's rights of early termination and the right to extend the contract up to a further 1 year.

Tender deadline

The tender process to procure these contracts will close at 9am on 21 January 2019.

Further information

[Civil 2018 contracts tender](#) – to find out more and download the Information For Applicants document

[e-Tendering system](#) – to submit your tender

[News story: Bournemouth and Preston in the running for major transport funding](#)

Preston and Bournemouth to join 10 other cities shortlisted for the Transforming Cities Fund.

[News story: Bournemouth and Preston in the running for major transport funding](#)

Commuters around Bournemouth and Preston will benefit from faster and easier journeys thanks to a share of a £2.5 billion government fund.

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole plus Preston will receive £50,000 to develop a business case. They join 10 other cities across England who have been [successfully shortlisted for the Transforming Cities Fund](#) which was [first announced at the 2017 Budget](#).

The fund will support the development and creation of new innovative public transport schemes developed to improve journeys and tackle congestion in some of England's biggest cities. Commuters will benefit from better connected

journeys making travelling to work and for leisure easier than ever before.

Bournemouth is looking to develop cycle highways and high-speed direct buses from outlying areas, improve transport hubs and enhance its use of technology to have real-time traffic management, a comprehensive travel app and setting the area up for better use of connected and autonomous vehicles.

Preston will look to develop plans to upgrade the South Fylde and East Lancashire rail lines, a parkway station at Cottam and interchanges for intra-urban busses, cycling and walking.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Our great cities and their suburbs are home to world-leading businesses. The Transforming Cities Fund will help develop good bus, cycle and tram routes to transform their transport systems – making it easier for people to get around and get to work, school or the shops.

We want to see more places like Preston and Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch benefit from better and more sustainable transport links to help the area flourish.

Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Robert Jenrick MP said:

I am delighted that residents of Bournemouth and Preston will be able to benefit from extra funding for transport in their areas. We are investing in infrastructure projects across the country to boost productivity and improve people's day-to-day lives. These 2 cities join 10 others who have already benefited from our commitment to keep Britain moving.

More than £1 billion has so far been allocated to 6 Mayoral authorities in Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Tees Valley, the West Midlands, the West of England, and Cambridge and Peterborough, providing significant transport improvements. This includes £160 million towards the Beeline Cycle Network in Greater Manchester which will see 1,000 miles of interlinked bike and pedestrian lanes connect communities across its 10 boroughs, helping to make cycling and walking a safer option for people living in the region.

Over the next 5 years to 2023, the funding will be used to improve transport links across the country. Bournemouth and Preston will now also be eligible to apply for a share of £90 million, which is being allocated to support the creation of Future Mobility Zones. These will trial new innovative transport technologies, services, digital payments and smart ticketing.

The Transforming Cities fund is one of a number of measures the government has introduced to support England's great cities as part of the [Industrial Strategy](#), providing £2.5 billion of funding towards upgrades for better,

safer, faster transport links.