

Press release: Joint Communiqué of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference 2 November 2018

The Government of Ireland was represented by Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Simon Coveney TD, and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr Charles Flanagan TD. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was represented by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon David Lidington MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP.

The Conference was established under Strand Three of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement “to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments”.

The Conference discussed the following:

Legacy

The Conference reviewed progress towards the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework.

Following the completion of the public consultation on draft legislation to establish the Stormont House Agreement legacy institutions, the UK Government updated the Conference on its next steps. The Irish Government updated the Conference on the progress on the legislative measures it is bringing forward to implement and support the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework and raised other legacy issues of concern.

Both the Irish and UK Governments reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the framework set out in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement to comprehensively address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past, taking account of the outcome of the UK Government’s public consultation on establishing the legacy institutions.

Security Co-Operation

The Conference reviewed the current security situation, and discussed the continuing threat posed by paramilitary activity and Northern Ireland Related Terrorism in both jurisdictions.

Both the UK and Irish Governments recalled commitments in the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement to ending paramilitarism. They welcomed the publication of the first report of the Independent Reporting Commission established under that Agreement, and considered its findings and recommendations. The Conference noted in particular the Commission’s view that the restoration of the institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement are essential to ending

paramilitarism and achieving community transformation.

The Conference expressed their gratitude to all those involved in both jurisdictions who work tirelessly to keep people safe.

East-West Matters

The Irish and UK Governments underlined the unique relationship between their two countries and the strong cooperation that takes place at all levels of government, and across many policy areas. They reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that this close relationship would be maintained and built upon.

The Conference discussed a number of possible models for ensuring that the high level of bilateral co-operation between the United Kingdom and Ireland is maintained and strengthened following the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union next March.

The Conference agreed that these new structures should clearly demonstrate the strength and depth of the relationship; provide opportunities for ministers and officials to continue to engage both formally and informally with each other; and to maintain the spirit of cooperation that has been engendered through such contacts in an EU context; as well as provide an overall architecture for cooperation that is both meaningful and sustainable in the future.

Officials were asked to take forward more detailed work in this area with a view to presenting fully worked through proposals for future East-West cooperation, for consideration by the UK and Irish Governments at a future meeting of the Conference. They agreed that these should be ambitious and should reflect the importance attached by both Governments to the bilateral relationship.

Political Stability

The Conference reviewed political developments since the last meeting in July and considered how the Irish and UK Governments can continue to work together to seek the effective operation of all of the institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

The UK and Irish Governments re-affirmed their shared commitment to securing the operation of the devolved power-sharing Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland and the consequent resumption of meetings of the North South Ministerial Council at the earliest opportunity.

Both the Irish and UK Governments reiterated their strong support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements. They underlined that the institutions of the Agreement have been essential for the progress made in Northern Ireland over the past two decades and that they remain the indispensable framework for the political process in Northern Ireland. Both the UK and Irish Governments agreed to continue working closely together in full accordance with the three-stranded approach set out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

Future meetings

It was agreed that the Conference would meet again in spring of 2019.

[Press release: Gulf security tops agenda at Chiefs of Defence meeting](#)

UK Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Nick Carter and Omani Chief of Staff SAF Lieutenant General Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani co-chaired the meeting that discussed issues of mutual security, including maritime security, and defence reform.

Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nick Carter said:

As Chiefs of Defence we share a long-standing friendship, respect and understanding of the regional challenges in the Gulf.

The UK is committed to sustaining security in the region and will continue to work in partnership with our allies to uphold the stability on which it depends.

At the meeting, the Chiefs gave their assessment of the current issues affecting maritime security and discussed proposals for increasing cooperation and information sharing. They also commended the fact that for first time all three Coalition Maritime Forces Task Forces are under command of GCC nations.

In addition, the Chiefs shared their experiences of defence reform as the UK and many regional partners are currently undergoing, or considering, reform and modernisation programmes.

They also discussed the common challenges, how to tackle them collectively, and how the constantly evolving security context and risks drive defence's objectives and procurement choices.

The meeting follows the success of Exercise Saif Sareea 3 which saw over 70,000 UK and Omani personnel live, work and train side by side over the past five weeks. It also marks the beginning of a wide-ranging defence engagement programme which will see the UK Armed Forces work with every single one of our Gulf partner nations in a combination of engagements in the air, on land, and at sea in the coming months.

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[Speech: When we speak for ourselves,](#)

we flourish – and our status in the WTO is no exception

As part of our work to set up the UK's own trade policy for the first time in over 40 years, we are currently establishing our independent goods "schedule" at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The UK is a full and founding member of the WTO and our status is no different from that of, say, Canada or Japan. But under the EU treaties, EU member states have agreed to speak with one voice on trade. In the WTO that means the Commission represents the member states. It also means the UK's rights and obligations are bound up with those of the other EU member states in common "schedules". One for goods and one for services, these are the official WTO documents that describe the tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and regulatory commitments that underpin our position in the multilateral trading system.

Before we leave the EU, the UK needs to separate its schedules from the EU's. As part of this process, WTO members have a chance to respond. A small number expressed reservations and would like to discuss further. Last week, I announced that the UK intends to open negotiations at the WTO to address these concerns. This has been purposefully misunderstood by those wishing to stop Brexit as evidence that our WTO strategy isn't working.

They are wrong. It's not unprecedented for a WTO member to trade on schedules that have not been approved by every other WTO member. In fact, the EU hasn't had an up to date certified goods schedule since 2004, and certainly doesn't have an updated services one.

The government's policy since October 2016 has been to establish the UK's independent position in the WTO by March 2019 so that we are prepared for a range of possible Brexit outcomes. That remains our policy, and last week's announcement is evidence that it is on track, not that it has failed.

Under WTO procedures, if changes to a country's schedule are of a purely technical and formal nature, members can use a process called "rectification" to make those changes. That is why we decided to replicate, as far as possible, the UK's existing rights and obligations. We have replicated thousands of tariffs lines in our EU schedules into our UK-only schedules.

We always knew agricultural quotas and subsidies would be different. You cannot copy and paste a quota or subsidy for the EU into the UK schedule: it would represent a major change to our agricultural trade on the one hand, and a major increase in the UK's rights to subsidise agriculture on the other. The UK and the EU came up with a methodology last year for dividing the EU's existing agricultural quotas and subsidies, based on existing trade flows with third countries. We knew there would be objections, because the countries that rely most on these quotas – the US, New Zealand, the major Latin American exporters – have been telling us, and the EU, from the outset.

We nevertheless used this methodology in our goods schedule and submitted it to the WTO membership, for 2 main reasons. First, we believe this represents a fair reproduction of the rights under the EU's existing schedule. And second, our priority was to first establish the UK's separate schedule in the WTO and only then to use other WTO processes that exist to address any objections to specific elements of it.

The objections we have received were therefore neither unexpected, nor a failure of our strategy. We have always been open to having more detailed discussions with partners once we had established our own schedule. That is why I have announced our intention to launch negotiations on these objections.

This process is unlikely to be fully complete by the time we leave the EU. But objecting WTO members cannot veto the UK trading on our uncertified goods, or services, schedules after next March. In the unlikely event of a "no deal" between the UK and EU, we will be able to take full control of our trade policy in March 2019 based on the schedule we have set out.

As the Director General of the WTO has said, the consequences of no deal would not be a walk in the park but nor would it be the end of the world. There will be difficult moments, but the UK will be ready to take back full control in the WTO from next March.