

Dominic Raab: Making a success of Brexit

Dominic Raab, Secretary of State for the Department for Exiting the EU, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

"I want to start with an appeal for tolerance.

We all know that Brexit is a controversial subject.

It excites strong passions.

But as a Party and as a country, we also need to keep a sense of proportion.

Everybody had a vote.

And most people have an opinion.

But only a small minority think it's worth fighting over,

Except when they're on Twitter.

It's important to remember that the person sitting next to you...

On the bus into town...

At your desk at work...

Round the breakfast table...

And, yes, here in this hall today...

May have voted the other way to you in the referendum.

That's the genius of our democracy.

We express our differences at the ballot box, but afterwards we come together, and respect the result.

When it comes to wanting what's best for Britain, we're all on the same side.

As someone who campaigned for Leave, not only do I respect the opinions of those who wanted us to remain in the EU.

I'd go further.

I think they made some important arguments and highlighted difficulties that some on my side were too quick to dismiss.

Disentangling our laws, our institutions and our economy from Brussels after

more than forty years of EU membership was never going to be straightforward or risk free.

To rise to this challenge, we'll need some unity of purpose.

And I believe we're at our best when we work together...

To forge something bigger than the sum of our parts...

As a government...

As a party...

And as a country.

For my part, I'm lucky to have a brilliant Ministerial team, with Martin Callanan, Robin Walker, Suella Braverman, and Chris Heaton-Harris working tirelessly to deliver the very best Brexit we can.

And the reason I accepted the Prime Minister's offer to join her Cabinet as Secretary of State is because my approach to Brexit is pragmatic, not dogmatic.

Do I think the deal we are pursuing is perfect?

Of course not.

Is it everything I wanted?

No it isn't.

This is a negotiation.

There have been compromises.

We're not decoupling as quickly or as completely as some would like.

And we have been prepared to accept certain EU requirements, in order to secure our own interests.

I've been back and forth to Brussels, negotiating the details of our Withdrawal Agreement and the framework for our Future Relationship.

The vast majority of the Withdrawal Agreement has been settled, although we still have some tricky issues outstanding, and we're making good progress on the Future Relationship.

We have been reasonable.

Some say too reasonable.

But our proposals would deliver a historic agreement that provides a roadmap out of the EU and a final deal that will be good for the whole country.

A deal that delivers on the referendum, because that is our democratic duty.

A deal that manages the risks of Brexit, because that is our responsibility.

A deal that grasps the opportunities of Brexit, because we're at our best when we're optimistic about the future.

And a deal that protects our precious Union, because we are the Conservative and Unionist Party.

To those of my fellow Eurosceptics who think it's not good enough...

I say this.

If I'd told you three years ago that we were going to...

End free movement...

Stop the vast annual budget contributions.

Leave the Single Market...

Get out of the Customs Union.

Pursue an independent trade policy...

Make Parliament supreme.

Protect the Union...

Exit the Common Fisheries Policy.

And ditch the Common Agricultural Policy...

You'd have bitten my arm off.

If the EU match our ambition and pragmatism, that's what our proposals will deliver.

I said: 'if the EU match our ambition and pragmatism'.

Unfortunately, that wasn't on display in Salzburg.

Our Prime Minister has been constructive and respectful.

In return we heard jibes from senior leaders...

And we saw a starkly one-sided approach to negotiation.

Where the EU's theological approach allows no room for serious compromise.

And yet we are expected to cast aside the territorial integrity of our own country.

If the EU want a deal, they need to get serious.

And they need to do it now.

At the same time, as in any negotiation, we will listen to alternative ways of delivering on the strategic criteria we have set out.

Because a good deal would be the best outcome for everyone.

But our willingness to compromise is not without limits.

We are leaving the European Union in fact, not just in name.

If we can't obtain a deal that secures that objective...

If an attempt is made to lock us in via the back door of the EEA or Customs Union...

If the only offer from the EU threatens the integrity of our Union...

Then we will be left with no choice but to leave with no deal.

That is why the whole of the government machine is busy preparing for No Deal.

Not because we want it...

Not because we think it's likely...

But because it might happen.

Some people say that No Deal is unthinkable.

Wrong.

What is unthinkable is that this government...

Or any British government...

Could be bullied by the threat of some kind of economic embargo, into signing a one-sided deal against our country's interests.

When it comes to no deal, we've heard some lurid predictions from the prophets of doom.

They claim planes will be grounded.

That ports will be blocked.

Let's have some common sense here.

Why on earth would any of these things happen?

Unless someone decided to make them happen.

Even if we can't secure a comprehensive deal with the EU...

I find it hard to believe that they would...

For narrow political ends...

Seek to punish Britain in such a crass and counterproductive way...

Threatening European as well as UK businesses and jobs...

And if I'm wrong, it's hardly an attractive argument for those suggesting we should stay in the club.

The reality: yes there are risks and potential short term disruption, but we'll deal with any problems that might arise in the event of No Deal in a calm and sensible manner...

As we've set out in 77 Technical Notices, from aviation to car insurance.

Beyond all the complexities of Brexit, one thing must be sacrosanct.

Democracy itself.

Two years ago we held a referendum in which more people voted than at any time, before or since.

Like any national vote, there were claims and counter-claims, and plenty of controversy.

It was ever thus...

Democracy is rough-edged, not clean-cut.

But one thing was crystal clear, and we all know it in our hearts.

It was even written in that official government leaflet sent to every household.

Let me read it to you:

"This is your decision.

The government will implement what you decide.”

We did decide.

It was close but it was clear.

Britain voted to leave the EU.

Respecting the result...

That’s the essence of our democracy.

And I have been heartened by the fact that the majority of those who voted to Remain have accepted the referendum verdict.

For them, the integrity of our democracy is far more important than winning or losing on any one issue.

But I’ll tell you what’s not democracy.

The efforts of a small, but influential group of senior politicians and establishment figures to overturn the result of the referendum.

They want to stop us leaving.

You can just picture them, sitting in an expensive advertising agency, discussing how to claim that black is white.

“Our research shows that the public doesn’t like the idea of a second referendum.”

“That’s all right – we’ll rebrand it a People’s Vote. They might buy that.”

“But there’s a real sense that Leave won fair and square. Most people just want to move on.”

“Don’t worry – we’ll bankroll a campaign to scare the wits out of them.”

“Hang on – the Project Fear stuff didn’t work too well first time around.”

“That’s because it wasn’t scary enough. This time we’ll claim that No Deal means patients won’t get their medicines, mobile phone roaming charges will go through the roof and space debris will fall from the sky.”

Honestly, it would be pathetic if it wasn’t so dangerous.

And under Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour party has now opened the door to reversing Brexit ...

A clear breach of their manifesto promise.

A deliberate tactic to weaken the UK’s negotiating position for their own political gain.

Just imagine, for a moment, if they succeeded.

Trust in our democracy would all but vanish.

Most people, whether they voted Remain or Leave, would see it for what it is.

A shameless ruse by an establishment that thinks that it has the right to keep asking the same question until it gets the answer it wants.

And who would benefit?

If there is mass disillusionment with the system, then it's the populists...

The far left and the alt right...

Who will reap the reward, as they have in other countries where the establishment has ignored people's concerns.

Where voters have been told that their hopes and fears are not important because the establishment knows best.

And because of that, in many of these nations, the extremists are on the march.

That's where this kind of disdain for democracy leads.

You don't think it could happen here?

Just look at the Labour Party.

A few years ago, the moderates of New Labour were in charge.

We had our differences with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Big differences.

But there was a shared understanding about the basic freedoms and tolerance that shore up our democracy...

And the civilised conduct of politics...

Give or take a couple of punches from John Prescott.

What happened?

Left wing extremists, long confined to the margins, took their chance, and took control of the Labour party.

Today, those extremists are led by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

They've captured the Labour Party, lock, stock and barrel.

Under the nose of Labour's leaders, they're using all the tools in the extremists' armoury.

Intimidation.

Fanaticism.

Scapegoating.

Especially against Jews.

The cosyng up to Holocaust deniers and terrorists.

The casual equation of Jews with the Israeli government.

The vicious abuse levelled at their own Jewish MPs.

That a once-great mainstream party should stoop so low, is a stain on Britain.

I say to Labour: you'd be surprised how many British people take this personally.

They know things that you choose to forget.

Eighty years ago – 1938 – Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia.

The lucky few fled.

Some of them to Britain.

One Jewish family arrived in England with a little boy called Peter.

He was six years old and he spoke no English.

That little boy grew up knowing that his grandmother, grandfather, most of his relatives...

The loved ones left behind...

Had been systematically murdered for no other reason than that they were Jews.

That little boy learnt English.

He got into a Grammar School.

And grasped the opportunities and embraced the tolerance that our great country offers.

He became a food-manager at Marks and Spencer...

And married a clothes buyer...

A Church of England girl from Bromley.

But he never forgot what had happened to his family.

That little boy was my father.

And I will honour his memory by fighting the scourge of antisemitism and racism until my last breath.

Because, none of us can rest until Corbyn, McDonnell and their extremist gang have been driven back to the margins where they belong.

And none of us should give succour to Labour's political opportunism on Brexit...

Which has just one aim...

To put Jeremy Corbyn in Downing Street.

That's why we must come together over Brexit...

And recognise that what divides us is nothing compared to our struggle with the Labour party.

An epic struggle we must win not just to defend people's jobs and livelihoods...

But to preserve the free and tolerant democracy that we cherish in this country.

Conference, it's time for us to stand together to make a success of Brexit...

So that the United Kingdom goes from strength to strength.

I know we can do it.

I know we will do it.

Because I believe in the British people.

I'm an optimist.

Not the rose-tinted kind.

I'm a stubborn optimist who believes we breathe life into hope through the tenacity of our efforts.

And I'm optimistic history will judge Brexit, not on the tortuous haggle with Brussels...

But as a springboard to a buccaneering global embrace of free trade...

To boost our amazing SMEs with wider export opportunities...

To create the jobs of the future...

To cut tariffs and to reduce the cost of living for low and middle income families...

And to give the poorest countries in the world their chance to trade and stand on their own two feet...

The surest route to real economic independence.

I'm an optimist, because I see that Britain is a country bursting with talent.

Scientific talent.

Creative talent.

Entrepreneurial talent.

We have a dynamic culture that takes the best of what we have and mixes it with bold innovations in every field of endeavour.

Our strength is that we keep producing and attracting amazing people who want to contribute to something bigger than themselves...

To something bigger than the sum of its parts.

That's why we're delivering Brexit.

Yes, to control immigration and regain public trust in the system.

But also to expand our global horizons...

So we attract the best and the brightest from around the world...

To invent the next life-saving drug...

To pioneer the next breath-taking technology...

To help us write the next chapter in our history.

Above all, I'm optimistic we will deliver Brexit.

Faithful to the referendum...

A spring-board to democratic revival...

To take back control over our own destiny.

So that politicians like me, never forget the humility which makes us accountable to you.

We've had our arguments.

But now is the time to put them behind us.

Now is the time to come together.

Because this is a moment for the optimists.

And ours is a country ready to shine."

ENDS

For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.