

News story: David Davis' closing remarks at the end of the fourth round of EU exit negotiations in Brussels

There is no doubting that this was a vital round of negotiations – taking place just days after an important intervention by the British Prime Minister.

Theresa May's speech in Florence had at its heart a desire to drive progress this week. It was intended to change the dynamic and instil real momentum.

It set out a clear, pragmatic approach designed to help secure an agreement that works for all sides.

It built on the hugely significant work that has gone on across Government over the last year that has seen us publish 14 papers covering technical negotiation detail and the United Kingdom's vision for the future relationship, the Article 50 letter and two crucial White Papers.

So this week my negotiating team came to Brussels armed with the detailed thinking that underpins the proposals set out by the Prime Minister.

And while – inevitably – this requires further discussion, I believe that thanks to the constructive and determined manner with which both sides have conducted these negotiations we are making decisive steps forward.

After four rounds, when I look across the full range of issues to do with our withdrawal from the EU, I am clear that we have made considerable progress on the issues that matter:

Increasing certainty for citizens and businesses;

Providing reassurance to our EU partners in regards to our mutual financial obligations

And agreeing on some of the key principles in relation to the issues arising for Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Now I make no secret of wanting to talk about the future, and the importance of this to business and citizens both in the European Union and the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister's speech sets out the scale of our ambition here as well as our proposal for a simple, clear, time-limited period of implementation.

This period, based on current terms, will ensure people, businesses and public services only have to plan for one set of changes. I believe this should be quick to agree, once Michel has a mandate to explore it with us.

As the Prime Minister said last week, our shared future can only be founded on partnership, friendship and most importantly trust. This is what discussions this week have been about.

Which brings me to the detail of our discussions.

Citizens' rights

On citizens' rights, we have made real progress on issues which will enable citizens on both sides to continue to live their lives broadly as they do now.

We will publish an updated table later today which shows many areas of agreement.

So I am pleased to report that we have have agreed most aspects of social security coordination, building on the progress in the last round, which I told you about last time.

The United Kingdom thinks that in some cases we must go beyond the strict requirements of current EU law in order to protect citizens. For example we have offered the European Union guaranteed rights of return for settled EU citizens in the UK, in return for onward movement rights, right for onward movement, for our UK nationals who currently live within the EU27.

And I look forward to the response of the Commission to this offer, once they have consulted with the Member States.

But we must also acknowledge that a major question remains open between us – it relates to the enforcement of citizens' rights after we leave the European Union.

The UK has been clear that, as a third country outside of the European Union, it would not be right for this role to be performed by the European Court of Justice.

But we have listened to the concerns that have been raised – and as a direct result of hearing those concerns the United Kingdom has committed to incorporating the final withdrawal agreement fully into UK law. Direct effect if you like.

We also recognise the need to ensure the consistent interpretation of EU law concepts.

We have not agreed the right mechanism for doing this yet but discussions this week have again been productive.

And we have provided further reassurance on how European Union citizens will be able to apply for a new status, once we leave.

And we know that those already holding permanent residency documents should not have to go through the full process.

So we presented early thinking on detailed processes and plans on how we might ensure this does not happen.

It's all about providing certainty, clarity and stability for EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living in the EU27. And represents pragmatic compromises to our shared challenge of ending anxiety for those citizens.

The shape of a deal is becoming clearer. We need to continue to work to address this in the interest of citizens on both sides.

Financial settlement

In her recent speech, the Prime Minister reassured our European partners they'll not need to pay more or receive less over the remainder of the current EU budget plan, as a result of our decision to leave.

The UK has explained this reassurance in detail to the Commission.

The Prime Minister also made clear that the UK will honour its commitments made during the period of our membership.

We are not yet at the stage of specifying exactly what these commitments are. That will need to come later.

Nevertheless, our negotiating teams have held very constructive discussions this week on detailed technical issues relating to that.

This work is necessary so that when the time comes we will be able to reach a political agreement. And discussions will continue.

Ireland

On the issues that arise from the UK's withdrawal from the EU in relation to Northern Ireland and Ireland, we have had a constructive discussion and made progress in some areas.

Both sides recognise that the unique situation and the special circumstances on the island of Ireland must fully inform any solutions.

We welcome the EU's recent guiding principles paper which reaffirms the high degree of alignment between us on this vital strand.

Specifically, this week, we have begun drafting joint principles on preserving the Common Travel Area and associated rights.

We have both agreed that the Good Friday Agreement citizenship rights must be upheld and we are working together on how this commitment is best codified.

The joint work which we agreed in the August negotiating round on preserving the North-South cooperation strand is moving along at pace.

We are addressing complex issues here but both are resolved to finding imaginative solutions.

We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland – and across the island of Ireland – to see these commitments through.

Separation issues

We remain firmly committed to making as much progress as possible on those issues that are related to our withdrawal from the EU institutions and must be resolved before our departure from the European Union.

I am encouraged by the progress we have made this week on issues relating to Euratom.

The EU welcomed our clear statement that we will maintain the same standards in our future nuclear safeguards regime which will be run by our existing nuclear regulator, the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

We are now close to reaching agreement on the vast majority of issues set out in our position papers on this issue.

Of course, we want to have a close and effective relationship with Euratom in the future and the best way to secure that is to press on with discussions on the details of this new partnership.

On a number of other issues – goods, union and Member State procedures, privileges and immunities and ongoing confidentiality obligations – we have had constructive discussion on technical issues and in some areas, reached agreement on the core issues.

At the beginning of the week, I mentioned the UK's real and ongoing commitment to our European friends and allies.

Our commitment to that ideal has been clear in these negotiations on those issues which relate to our departure from the institutions.

Conclusion

As I said at the start – this round was a vital one.

We've made important progress and capitalised on the momentum created by the Prime Minister's speech.

We are working quickly through a number of complex issues, yet there remain some points where further discussion – and pragmatism – will be required to reach agreement.

It is true that there are differences of opinion. But with the continued diligence and creativity of our teams, I am confident we can resolve these.

While the UK's departure from the European Union is inevitably a complex process, it is in all of our interests for these negotiations to succeed.

We must never forget the bigger picture. Britain wants to be the European Union's strongest friend and partner.

We want us both to thrive side by side.

I leave Brussels optimistic about this future and I look forward to continuing the negotiations.

Thank you.