

News story: Protecting the vital UK common market – David Lidington speech

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington MP today [Friday 11 May] used a major business speech in Edinburgh to call on the Scottish Government to back the EU (Withdrawal) Bill next week, and provide Scottish businesses with the same certainty and clarity as companies in other parts of the UK.

Speaking at a CBI Scotland lunch in the Scottish capital, Mr Lidington said that the “door is still open” for the Scottish Government to sign up to the agreement that has already been reached with Welsh Government and “end any question of lingering legal uncertainty for businesses in all parts of the UK”.

The Minister told the business audience that common UK frameworks will be required in certain areas to help companies all across the UK to do business in all parts of the UK. He will also say that respecting and preserving the UK common market underpins our existence as a union and that any attempt to undermine it would be a “self-inflicted blow” on thousands of Scottish companies.

Mr Lidington said:

It is only by maintaining the coherence of the common UK market – and keeping barriers to trade within it to an absolute minimum – that businesses and consumers in all parts of our union can continue to benefit.

Preserving the common market is exactly what the EU Withdrawal Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, will do.

Put simply, respecting and preserving the United Kingdom common market is to uphold one of the fundamental expressions of the constitutional integrity that underpins our existence as a union.

But put even more simply, any attempt to undermine that common market would represent a self-inflicted blow to the thousands of firms who owe their prosperity to its success.

I am well aware from the conversations I have had with businesses in Scotland and Wales – and indeed Northern Ireland – that what

they care about is what all this means for business and whether it provides the certainty they need.

That is why all of us – Westminster, Cardiff and Holyrood – have worked hard to identify only those absolutely essential areas where we agree that UK-wide frameworks are needed and it is worth underlining that we already have UK-wide frameworks in all these areas right now.

So it is also why it is disappointing that the Scottish Government still does not feel able to sign up to our proposals and deliver that certainty for businesses.

Of course, it is rightly for the Scottish Parliament to now decide what view it wants to take on the compromise we have reached, and that we have now agreed with the Welsh Government.

So that is why I say to the Scottish Government: the door is still open.

At a stroke, they can join the Welsh Government – who have also put so much into getting us to this stage – and recommend to the Parliament here in Holyrood that we should end any lingering question of legal uncertainty for businesses in all parts of the UK,

But no matter what, I want to reiterate that the UK Government is committed to acting in accordance with the Intergovernmental Agreement that – even now at this late stage – is open to the Scottish Government to sign up to.

Scottish businesses can see this in black and white: our Intergovernmental Agreement is public for all to see.

You can have that certainty and clarity that we will work to agree the approach needed to protect our vital common market and that we will respect – in full – the devolution settlements as we do so.

The full text of the speech is [here](#). The EU (Withdrawal) Bill returns to the House of Lords next week [Wednesday 16 May) for its third reading.