

News story: Secretary of State Dominic Raab's statement – update on EU Exit negotiations

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the progress in negotiations to leave the EU, and the government's planning for No Deal.

Negotiations

Since I last updated the House, our negotiations with the EU have continued and intensified.

Over the recess break, we have been engaging constructively with our EU counterparts.

Let me take the main areas of the negotiations in turn.

On the Withdrawal Agreement, while there remain some differences, we are closing in on workable solutions to all the key outstanding issues, building on the progress we made during the summer on issues such as data and information, the treatment of ongoing police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, and ongoing Union judicial and administrative procedures after the date of exit.

We have also been discussing proposals on the linkage needed between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Future Relationship, and the EU is engaging constructively.

On the Northern Ireland Protocol, we remain committed to the undertakings we made in the Joint Report back in December, to agree a backstop in case there is a delay between the end of the Implementation Period and the entry into force of the treaty on our future relationship.

That was agreed to avoid any risk of a return to a hard border in the intervening period.

But we will not accept anything that threatens the constitutional or economic integrity of the United Kingdom.

Creating any form of customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which is what the EU had proposed, would put that at risk and that it is unacceptable.

As my Rt Hon friend the Prime Minister has said, it is not something she, nor any British Prime Minister, could conceivably agree to.

We are engaging with the EU on our alternative proposals that preserve the integrity of the UK.

They will be in line with the commitments we made back in December, including the commitment that no new regulatory barriers should be created between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK unless the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly agree.

On the Future Relationship, we continue to make progress, for example, on both the internal and the external security arrangements for future cooperation, although there is still some way to go.

And as the House will know, the Prime Minister presented our proposals on the economic partnership to EU leaders, at the informal Salzburg Summit.

We understand that the EU has raised some concerns, particularly around the distinction between goods and services under the common rule book and with respect to the Facilitated Customs Arrangement.

We continue to engage constructively with the EU, we continue to press our case.

The UK's White Paper proposals are the best way of ensuring there is continued frictionless trade in goods after Britain leaves the EU, whilst fulfilling the joint commitment to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and respecting the referendum.

These negotiations, Mr Speaker, were always bound to be tough in the final stretch.

That is all the more reason why we should hold our nerve, stay resolute and focused, and I remain confident that we will reach a deal this autumn.

Because it is still in the best interests of the UK, and the European Union.

It is the best way of protecting trade between Britain and the EU, trade which underpins millions of jobs across Europe.

It is the best way of making sure we continue to cooperate seamlessly on security matters, to tackle crime and terrorism to keep UK and EU citizens safe.

And it is the best way to avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland that would adversely affect communities living there, or indeed separating Northern Ireland from Great Britain which we will not countenance.

To achieve these aims, the UK has brought forward serious and credible proposals.

We continue to engage with the EU to press our case, and to better understand the nature of some of their concerns.

Equally, it is time for the EU to match the ambition and pragmatism that we have shown.

No Deal

Mr Speaker, while we intensify negotiations to secure the deal we want, the deal that we expect, we are also expediting preparations for no deal.

In case the EU do not match the ambition and pragmatism we have demonstrated.

As the Prime Minister stated on 21 September after the Salzburg Summit.

The government has made clear we will unilaterally protect the rights of EU citizens in the UK in the event of No Deal.

To the 3 million here, we say: you are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues, we want you to stay.

And we will be setting out all of the details as soon as is practical.

We also now urge the EU and all its member states to step up and give UK citizens on the continent the same reassurances.

Mr Speaker it is time, on both sides, to provide all our citizens with that comfort and with that confidence.

Since I last updated the House in September, we have published 52 more technical notices, in two further batches.

They inform people, businesses and other key stakeholders of the steps they need to take, if we don't reach a deal with the EU.

They cover a wide range of sectors, building on other work that has taken place across government over the last two years.

They enable us to prepare the UK for Brexit irrespective of the outcome of the negotiations.

They acknowledge that there are risks to a no deal scenario.

But they also demonstrate the steps we will take to avoid, mitigate and manage any potential short-term risks and disruption.

Overall now we have published 77 technical notices which form part of the sensible, proportionate, measures that we are taking to prepare the country for every eventuality.

Mr Speaker our most recent batch of technical notices were published on the 24th of September they are set out in a written Ministerial statement today.

There are 24 and they range from aviation, and the advice for airlines on the impact of 'no deal' and the actions for them to consider to maintain services on the day we leave the EU, through to car insurance, and the arrangements to ensure Green Cards will be available free of charge from insurance companies to enable UK drivers to continue to drive on the continent.

The publication of the technical notices enables further engagement as part

of our No Deal planning.

So for example, our earlier technical notice on VAT set out the VAT changes that companies will need to prepare for when importing or exporting goods from the EU, when supplying services to the EU, or interacting with EU VAT IT systems.

That one was welcomed by the British Chamber of Commerce, and we are grateful to them and to all of our stakeholders for their constructive ongoing engagement on that necessary planning.

More broadly, I met with the British Chamber of Commerce, the CBI, the IoD, EEF and the Federation of Small Businesses as part of the government's Business Advisory Group on the 17th of September, to make sure we are explaining our negotiating proposals and No Deal planning, and listening to UK businesses of all sizes, and across all sectors.

We will keep providing people and businesses with the advice they need as we negotiate our exit from the European Union.

We also keep working with the devolved administrations on all aspects of our planning for exit.

I attended the joint ministerial committee on the 13th September.

It has now met 12 times, and our last meeting was a valuable opportunity to give the devolved administrations a full update on the negotiations, as well as discuss the necessary No Deal planning.

We continue to listen very carefully to all of their views.

Mr Speaker, that is the way, with concerted effort on all fronts, that we have put ourselves in the best possible position to make the best of Brexit.

And I commend this statement to the House.