

PM statement on European Council: 24 June 2019

Mr Speaker, before I turn to the European Council, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our very best wishes to the former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

All our thoughts are with him and his family at this time – and we wish him a full and speedy recovery.

Mr Speaker, last week's European Council focused on climate change, disinformation and hybrid threats, external relations and what are known as the EU's "Top Jobs".

The UK has always been clear that we will participate fully and constructively in all EU discussions for as long as we are a Member State – and that we will seek to continue our co-operation on issues of mutual interest through our future relationship after we have left.

And that was the spirit in which I approached this Council.

Mr Speaker, earlier this month the UK became the first major economy in the world to commit to ending its contribution to global warming by 2050.

And I am pleased that the regulations to amend the 2008 Climate Change Act – which are being debated in this Chamber later today – have received widespread support from across this House.

But ultimately we will only protect our planet if we are able to forge the widest possible global agreements.

That means other countries need to follow our lead and increase their ambitions as well.

At this Council the UK helped to lead the way in advocating for our European partners to follow suit in committing to a net zero target by 2050.

While a full EU-wide consensus was not reached, "a large majority" of Member States did agree that "climate neutrality must be achieved by 2050".

And I hope we can build on this in the months ahead.

In the margins of the Council, I also met Prime Minister Conte and discussed the UK's bid to host next year's UN climate summit, COP26, in partnership with Italy.

This will continue to put the UK at the heart of driving global efforts to tackle the climate emergency and leave a better world for our children.

Turning to disinformation and hybrid threats, we agreed to continue working

together to raise awareness, increase our preparedness, and strengthen the resilience of our democracies.

I welcome the development of a new framework for targeted sanctions to respond to hybrid threats.

This sends a clear message that the UK and its EU partners are willing and able to impose a cost for irresponsible behaviour in cyberspace.

Mr Speaker, we must also make more progress in helping to ensure that the internet is a safe place for all our citizens.

That is why we are legislating in the UK to create a legal duty of care on internet companies to keep users safe from harm. And this will be backed up an independent regulator with the power to enforce its decisions.

We are the first country to put forward such a comprehensive approach, but it isn't enough to act alone.

So building on The Christchurch Call to Action Summit, the UK will continue to help drive the broadest possible global action against online harms, including at the G20 in Japan later this week.

In the discussion on external relations the Council expressed its concern over Russia's issuing of passports in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions – and reiterated its call for Russia to release the Ukrainian sailors and vessels captured in the Kerch Strait in November last year.

Russia has consistently failed to deliver its commitments under the Minsk agreements and continues its destabilising activity.

So with the UK's full support, the Council agreed a six month roll-over of Tier III sanctions, which include restrictions on Russia's access to EU capital markets, an arms embargo, and restricting co-operation with Russia's energy sector.

In marking the fifth anniversary of the downing of flight MH17, we also welcomed the announcement from the Netherlands that criminal charges are being brought against four individuals – and offered our continued support in bringing those responsible to justice.

The Council also expressed serious concerns over Turkey's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The UK has made it clear to Turkey that drilling in this area must stop. And our priority must be to see the situation de-escalated.

In the margins of the Council I also raised the issue of Iran. We are calling on Iran to urgently de-escalate tensions, and our priority remains finding a diplomatic solution to the current situation in the region.

Mr Speaker, a substantial part of the Council focused on what are known as the EU's "Top Jobs" – namely the appointments of the next Presidents of the

EU's institutions and the EU's High Representative.

This is, of course, primarily a matter for the 27 remaining EU Member States.

So I have been clear that the UK will engage constructively and will not stand in the way of a consensus among the other Member States.

But it is also in our national interest that those appointed are constructive partners for the UK, as well as successful leaders of the EU's institutions.

The UK supports President Tusk's approach to create a package of candidates across the top jobs which reflect the diversity of the European Union.

As there was no consensus on candidates at this meeting, the Council agreed to meet again after the G20 this coming Sunday – as well as holding further discussions with the European Parliament.

So Mr Speaker, while I had originally anticipated that this would be my final European Council as Prime Minister, I will in fact have one more.

Finally Mr Speaker, President Tusk and President Juncker updated the remaining 27 Member States on Brexit.

This scheduled update was part of the agreement I reached in April to extend the Article 50 deadline for our departure from the EU to 31st October.

The Council repeated its desire to avoid a disorderly Brexit and committed to work constructively with my successor as Prime Minister.

And I commend this Statement to the House.