

Press release: David Davis' statement: EU-UK Article 50 negotiations Brussels, Monday 19 March 2018

Thank you Michel, both for your words and for your kind words about our team.

In December we reached an important milestone by achieving agreement on the first phase of negotiations.

And today, we've taken another significant step by reaching agreement on the next phase.

Which I am confident will be welcomed by the European Council when it meets later this week.

Our teams have worked hard and at pace to secure the terms of a time-limited implementation period that gives the certainty demanded by businesses and citizens across the European Union and United Kingdom.

And at this point I'd like to join Michel in commending both our negotiating teams for their skill, their commitment and from time to time their ability to go without sleep.

In my speech in Teesport in January, I set out a framework for delivering a bridge to the future.

One that sees the UK formally leave the European Union on the 29th of March. Which gives everyone time they need to prepare for the future, by ensuring our access to each other's markets continues on current terms.

The deal we've reached today does just that.

As Michel outlined we've taken a decisive step by translating much of December's Joint Report into the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement.

In only a few weeks we have managed to finalise the chapters on the financial settlement and citizens' rights – delivering on our commitment to provide certainty to citizens.

So let me take each point in turn, starting with the implementation period.

Throughout this process, one message has been clear from businesses in the United Kingdom and across the European Union – that they need to be able to plan for the future with confidence.

Businesses need not delay investment decisions, or rush through contingency plans based on guesses about the future deal.

Instead they now have certainty about the terms that will apply immediately

after our withdrawal.

Meaning that they can continue to operate and invest with confidence, as the design of our future partnership with the European Union becomes clear.

And this is true across the whole United Kingdom family – because the territorial scope of the Withdrawal Agreement makes clear it includes Gibraltar.

We continue with our positive dialogue with the Spanish on how we improve cooperation in the future.

Platform for the future

The implementation period is not only about providing certainty in the short term. It's also about beginning life outside the European Union, serving as a platform on which we build our future relationship.

Which is why, as Michel said, the United Kingdom will be able to step out, sign and ratify new trade deals with old friends – and new allies – around the globe for the first time in more than 40 years

These will come into force when the implementation period is over.

Providing new opportunities for businesses across the United Kingdom and seizing one of Brexit's greatest opportunities.

International agreements

And during this period, we have agreed those international agreements which arise from our European Union membership continue to apply as now.

This provides further certainty for businesses, who can be confident there will be no disruption to their existing trade relationship as we leave the European Union

Safeguards

To ensure our agreement is faithfully and fully implemented we are establishing a Joint Committee made up of representatives from the United Kingdom and the European Union.

This committee will provide a way to resolve concerns as they arise.

And will be underpinned by a clear commitment from both sides to act in good faith.

One of the key objectives I set out in my Teesport speech was that the United Kingdom would be able to make its voice heard during this period and ensure our interests are protected.

This delivers on that objective.

Fisheries

We've also agreed specific safeguards when it comes to annual fishing negotiations.

These arrangements will only apply for the negotiations in 2019, since we will still be a Member State for those that take place at the end of this year.

Through 2020 we will be negotiating fishing opportunities as an independent coastal state, deciding who can access our waters and on what terms.

For the year where it is relevant, we have agreed the European Union will have to consult us ahead of the negotiations.

And the United Kingdom's share of the total catch cannot be changed, protecting the interests of the United Kingdom fishing community.

Foreign policy and defence collaboration

The final way in which the implementation period serves as a platform for the future is in foreign and defence policy.

As recent events demonstrate, close cooperation with our allies is central to standing up for a rules-based international order.

So when it comes to foreign policy and defence collaboration, we have set out a plan for an ambitious partnership.

One that goes beyond the relationship the European Union has with any other third country.

And I know this desire is shared by our European Union partners.

The deal we have reached today envisages us moving to that partnership at the soonest possible moment.

And in the intervening period, our valued cooperation will continue.

However, as is the case today there may be occasions when our vital national policy means we cannot agree with European Union decision.

In those cases the United Kingdom could choose not to apply it.

Wider progress on the Withdrawal Agreement

Securing an implementation period, with these key flexibilities, is a major achievement.

And if it was all we had achieved since December I'd be proud of my team.

But in addition we have made rapid progress across the wider Withdrawal

Agreement – reaching agreement on much of the legal text, and locking down entire chapters on citizens' rights and the financial settlement.

Most importantly this means that, just as we're giving certainty to businesses, we're also providing the same for citizens.

And in doing so we've reached agreement on the package that should apply to those who arrive during the implementation period itself.

A few weeks ago, we proposed a pathway to settlement for EU citizens, which was welcomed by Member States.

Today we have delivered on the spirit of this offer, and also made it reciprocal, using the December deal as the basis.

In doing so, we have made sure the voluntary reference mechanism we agreed in December will start when we leave in March 2019 for any challenges relating to applications for settled status.

The reference mechanism relating to other rights, such as social security, which are only relevant after the implementation period, will begin in December 2020.

Northern Ireland and Ireland

Of course, there are areas where there is more to do before we can finalise the agreement as a whole – one of which is Northern Ireland.

Make no mistake – both the United Kingdom and the European Union are committed to the Joint Report in its entirety.

And in keeping with that commitment, we agree on the need to include legal text detailing the 'backstop' solution for the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland in the Withdrawal Agreement that is acceptable to both sides.

But it remains our intention to achieve a partnership that is so close as to not require specific measures in relation to Northern Ireland, and therefore we will engage in detail on all the scenarios set out in the Joint Report.

We have also reached consensus on the full set of issues which need to be addressed in any solution in order to avoid a hard border, which is why, last week, we set out a work programme to tackle them.

There are also some elements of the draft protocol – such as the Common Travel Area – on which we agree.

So while there is as yet no agreement on the right operational approach, we know what we need to do – and we're going to get on with it.

Conclusion

In December, we set out a shared ambition to reach agreement on the implementation period as soon as possible.

Today we have achieved that ambition, thanks to the hard work and late nights of both our dedicated teams.

Now, alongside progressing the outstanding issues in the Withdrawal Agreement, our attention must turn to the future.

In Munich and at Mansion House, the Prime Minister set out a powerful vision. One which will ensure our economic and security cooperation reflects our unique starting point and our shared history.

My job and that of my team is to deliver on that vision – and in doing so, we must seize the moment and carry forward the momentum of the past few weeks.

The deal we have struck today, on top of that agreed in December, should give us confidence that a good deal for the United Kingdom and the European Union is closer than ever before.