

Prime Minister's opening statement to the House of Commons on the UK-EU deal: 30 December 2020

Thank you Mr Speaker, can I begin by thanking you and the House authorities and all your staff and their hard work in allowing us to meet today, and can I also welcome the outstanding news that AstraZeneca is now rolling out a new UK made vaccine approved by the MHRA that offers the hope to millions in this country and around the world, Mr Speaker I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time,

and having taken back control of our money, our borders, our laws and our waters by leaving the European Union on Jan 31st, we now seize the moment

to forge a fantastic new relationship with our European neighbours, based on free trade and friendly co-operation.

And at the heart of this Bill is one of the biggest free trade agreements in the world, a comprehensive Canada-style deal, worth over £660 billion,

which, if anything, should allow our companies to do even more business with our European friends,

safeguarding millions of jobs and livelihoods in our UK and across the continent.

In less than 48 hours, we will leave the EU single market and the customs union, as we promised

and yet British exporters will not face a sudden thicket of trade barriers,

but rather, for the first time in the history of EU agreements, zero tariffs and zero quotas.

And just as we have avoided trade barriers, so we have also ensured the UK's full control of our laws and our regulations

and there is a vital symmetry between those two achievements,

because the central purpose of this Bill is to accomplish something that the British people always knew in their hearts could be done,

but which we were continually told was impossible, we were told we could not have our cake and eat it, do you remember how often we were told that Mr Speaker,

namely that we could trade and cooperate with our European neighbours on the closest terms of friendship and goodwill,

whilst retaining sovereign control of our laws and our national destiny.

And that unifying thread runs through every clause of

this Bill, it embodies our vision – shared with our European neighbours –

of a new relationship between Britain and the EU as sovereign equals,

joined by friendship, commerce, history, interests and values, while respecting one another's freedom of action and recognising that we have nothing to fear if we sometimes choose to do things differently

and we have much to gain from the healthy stimulus of competition. And this Bill demonstrates therefore how Britain can be at once European and sovereign.

And I think you'll agree Mr Speaker our negotiators accomplished their feat with astonishing speed.

It took nearly 8 years for the Uruguay Round of world trade talks to produce a deal,

and five years for the EU to reach a trade agreement with Canada, six for Japan.

We have done this in less than a year, in the teeth of a pandemic,

and we have pressed ahead with this task, resisting all the calls for delay, Mr Speaker

precisely because creating certainty about our future

provides the best chance of beating Covid and bouncing back even more strongly next year. And that was our objective.

So I hope the House will join me in commending my Noble Friend Lord Frost and every member of his team for their skill, their mastery and their perseverance in translating our vision into a practical agreement.

And let me also pay tribute to President Ursula von der Leyen, Michel Barnier and all our European friends for their pragmatism and foresight

and for their understanding that it is profoundly in the interests of the EU to live alongside a prosperous, contented and sovereign United Kingdom.

The House understands the significance of the fact that the basis of this agreement is not EU law but international law,

so there is no direct effect,

the EU law will no longer have any special status in the UK

and there is no jurisdiction for the European Court of Justice.

We will be able to design our own standards and regulations,

And Mr Speaker the laws that this House of Commons passes will be interpreted – and I know this is of keen interest to honourable and right honourable members – solely by British judges sitting in British courts.

We will have opportunity to devise new ways to spur and encourage the flourishing sectors in which this country leads the world,

from green energy and life sciences to synthetic biology.

We will be free Mr Speaker of EU state aid rules,

We'll be able to decide where and how we level up across our country with new jobs and new hope,

including with freeports and new green industrial zones of a kind I'm sure he'd approve of.

And if, in using our new freedoms, either Britain or the EU believes it is somehow being unfairly undercut,

then subject to independent third party arbitration – and provided the measures are proportionate –

either of us can decide, as sovereign equals, to protect our consumers.

But this treaty explicitly envisages that any such action should be infrequent

and it banishes the old concepts of uniformity and harmonisation in favour of the right to make our own regulatory choices and deal with the consequences.

And Mr Speaker, every modern free trade agreement includes reciprocal commitments designed to prevent distortions of trade

and the true significance of the agreement embodied in this Bill

is that there is no role for the European Court of Justice,

no ratchet clause on labour or environmental standards

and no dynamic alignment with the EU State Aid regime – or indeed any other aspect of EU law.

In every respect, we have recovered our freedom of action.

We will be free of the strictures of the Common Agricultural Policy,

We'll be able to conserve our landscapes and support our farmers exactly as we choose.

And on Friday – for the first time 50 years – on Friday

the UK will once again be recognised as an independent coastal state, regaining control of our waters,

righting the wrong that was done by the Common Fisheries Policy throughout our EU Membership.

And of course, I've always recognised Mr Speaker that this was going to be a difficult period for our European friends and partners, because they've been fishing in these waters for decades if not centuries and at first – as the House will know – they sought an adjustment period of 14 years,

but our negotiators whittled that down to five and a half years,

during which the UK's share – in that five and a half years – the UK's share of our fish in our waters will rise from over half today to around two thirds.

And of course we would like to have done this more quickly,

but it's also true that once the adjustment period comes to an end, there will be no limit Mr speaker – other than the limits placed by the needs of science and conservation – on our ability to make use of our marine wealth,

and 15 per cent of the EU's historic catch from our waters will be returned to this country next year alone.

And as I say to prepare our fishing communities for that moment, we will invest £100 million in a programme to modernise their fleets and the fish processing industry,

Restoring Mr Speaker a great British industry to the eminence that it deserves, levelling up communities across the UK – particularly and including in Scotland

Where their interests in my view have been neglected for too long.

So I do find it extraordinary that on the eve of this great opportunity the declared position of the Scottish National nationalist Party is to hand control – with a small n – is to hand control of the very waters we have just reclaimed straight back to the EU. That is their policy Mr Speaker.

And they plan to ensnare Scotland's fishing fleet in the dragnets of the Common Fisheries Policy all over again.

And, in the meantime, Mr Speaker – guess what they are going to do today – they are going to vote today for a “No Deal Brexit”,

proving once and for all,

that the interests of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland

are best served by a One Nation party serving One United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker, this deal was negotiated by a big team, and he should know this,

from every part of our United Kingdom,

and it serves the whole of the UK,

not least by protecting the integrity of the United Kingdom single internal market and Northern Ireland's place within it.

Our points-based immigration system will end free movement and give us full control over who enters our country and by the way on that point I want to thank very much my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for all he did to protect the interest of Northern Ireland.

And at the same time the deal provides certainty for airlines and hauliers – who have suffered grievously during this pandemic –

It guarantees the freedom of British citizens to travel to and from the EU, and retain access to healthcare.

It provides certainty for our police, for our border forces, for our security agencies, who work alongside our European friends to keep our people safe. They are going to vote against this Mr Speaker.

It provides certainty for our partnerships on scientific research,

because we want our country to be a science superpower, but also a collaborative science superpower.

And it provides certainty for business Mr Speaker.

from financial services to our world leading manufactures, including our car industry,

safeguarding highly skilled jobs and investment across our country.

As for the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, I am delighted that he has found yet another position on Brexit,

and having plunged down every blind alley and exhausted every possible alternative,

he has come to the right conclusion,

namely to vote for this agreement which this Government has secured.

But alas the good news about the Labour party stops there

Because I'm told the Right Honourable Gentleman intends to ask the British people for a mandate to rewrite the deal in 2024. That's what he wants to do.

I think frankly Mr Speaker we got Brexit done, let's keep Brexit done,

and let's keep Brexit done, and let's press ahead with this Government's mission to unite and level up across our whole country

and grasp the opportunities before us.

Because I have always said that Brexit is not an end but a beginning,

and the responsibility now rests with all of us to make the best use of the powers that we have regained,

and the tools that we have taken back into our hands.

And we're going to begin by fulfilling our manifesto promise to maintain the highest standards of labour and environmental regulation,

because no caricature could be more inaccurate

than the idea of some bargain basement, Dickensian Britain,

as if enlightened EU regulation has in the past been our only salvation from Dickensian squalor.

Our national standards have always been among the very best in the world

and this House can be trusted to use its new freedom to keep them that way, without any outside invigilation.

We are going to open Mr Speaker a new chapter in our national story, striking free trade deals around the world, adding to the agreements with 63 countries we have already achieved,

and reasserting Global Britain as a liberal, outward-looking force for good.

Detaching ourselves from the EU is only a prelude to the greater task of establishing our new role,

and this country is contributing more than any other to vaccinate people across the world against Covid

and leading the way in preventing future pandemics and we will continue to campaign for 12 years of quality education for every girl in the world and I thank my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary for what he's doing on that,

and we will continue to lead the drive towards global net zero, as we host COP26 in Glasgow next year.

And I hope and believe – and I think actually the tone this morning has given me encouragement in this belief Mr Speaker – the mood in the House this morning which seems to me on the whole to be positive. I hope in spite of the as usual, thin, synthetic, confected indignation that we hear from some of the benches opposite – I hope and believe that this agreement will also serve to end some of the rancour and recrimination that we've had in recent years,

allow us to come together as a country, to leave old arguments, old desiccated super masticated arguments behind, move on and build a new and great future for our country.

Because those of us who campaigned for Britain to leave the EU never sought a rupture with our closest neighbours.

We never wanted to sever ourselves from fellow democracies beneath whose soil lie British war graves in tranquil cemeteries,

often tended by local schoolchildren,

testament to our shared struggle for freedom and everything we cherish in common.

What we wanted was not a rupture but a resolution, a resolution of the old, tired, vexed question of Britain's political relations with Europe, which has bedevilled our post-War history. First, we stood aloof, then we became a half-hearted, sometimes obstructive member of the EU.

Now, with this Bill, we are going to become a friendly neighbour – the best friend and ally the EU could have – working hand-in-glove whenever our values and interests coincide while fulfilling the sovereign wish of the British people to live under their own laws, made by their own elected Parliament.

That is the historic resolution delivered by this Bill and Mr Speaker I commend it to the House.