

Prime Minister's statement on EU negotiations: 24 December 2020

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It is four and a half years since the British people voted to take back control of their money, their borders, their laws, and their waters and to leave the European Union.

And earlier this year we fulfilled that promise and we left on Jan 31 with that oven-ready deal.

Since that time we have been getting on with our agenda.

Enacting the points based immigration system that you voted for and that will come into force on Jan 1.

And doing free trade deals with 58 countries around the world.

And preparing the new relationship with the EU.

And there have been plenty of people who have told us that the challenges of the Covid pandemic have made this work impossible.

And that we should extend the transition period.

And incur yet more delay.

And I rejected that approach precisely because beating Covid is our number one national priority and I wanted to end any extra uncertainty and to give this country the best possible chance of bouncing back strongly next year.

And so I am very pleased that this afternoon that we have completed the biggest trade deal yet, worth £660 billion.

A comprehensive Canada style free trade deal between the UK and the EU, a deal that will protect jobs across this country.

A deal that will allow UK goods and components to be sold without tariffs and without quotas in the EU market.

A deal which will if anything should allow our companies and our exporters to do even more business with our European friends.

And yet which achieves something that the people of this country instinctively knew was doable.

But which they were told was impossible.

We have taken back control of laws and our destiny.

We have taken back control of every jot and tittle of our regulation.

In a way that is complete and unfettered.

From Jan 1 we are outside the customs union, and outside the single market.

British laws will be made solely by the British Parliament.

Interpreted by UK judges sitting in UK courts.

And the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will come to an end.

We will be able to set our own standards, to innovate in the way that we want, to originate new frameworks for the sectors in which this country leads the world, from biosciences to financial services, artificial intelligence and beyond.

We will be able to decide how and where we are going to stimulate new jobs and new hope.

With freeports and new green industrial zones.

We will be able to cherish our landscape and our environment in the way we choose.

Backing our farmers and backing British food and agricultural production.

And for the first time since 1973 we will be an independent coastal state with full control of our waters with the UK's share of fish in our waters rising substantially from roughly half today to closer to 2/3 in five and a half years' time after which there is no theoretical limit beyond those placed by science or conservation on the quantity of our own fish that we can fish in our waters.

And to get ready for that moment those fishing communities we will be helped with a big £100m programme to modernise their fleets and the fish processing industry.

And I want to stress that although of course the arguments with our European friends and partners were sometimes fierce this is, I believe a good deal for the whole of Europe and for our friends and partners as well.

Because it will not be a bad thing for the EU to have a prosperous and dynamic and contented UK on your doorstep.

And it will be a good thing – it will drive jobs and prosperity across the whole continent.

And I don't think it will be a bad thing if we in the UK do things differently, or take a different approach to legislation.

Because in so many ways our basic goals are the same.

And in the context of this giant free trade zone that we're jointly creating

the stimulus of regulatory competition will I think benefit us both.

And if one side believes it is somehow being unfairly undercut by the other, then subject to independent third party arbitration and provided the measures are proportionate, we can either of us decide – as sovereign equals – to protect our consumers.

But this treaty explicitly envisages that such action should only happen infrequently and the concepts of uniformity and harmonisation are banished in favour of mutual respect and mutual recognition and free trade.

And for squaring that circle, for finding the philosopher's stone that's enabled us to do this I want to thank President von der Leyen of the European Commission and our brilliant negotiators led by Lord Frost and Michel Barnier, on the EU side Stephanie Rousseau as well as Oliver Lewis, Tim Barrow, Lindsay Appleby and many others.

Their work will be available for scrutiny, followed by a parliamentary vote I hope on Dec 30.

This agreement, this deal above all means certainty.

It means certainty for the aviation industry and the hauliers who have suffered so much in the Covid pandemic.

It means certainty for the police and the border forces and the security services and all those that we rely on across Europe to keep us safe.

It means certainty for our scientists who will be able to continue to work together on great collective projects.

Because although we want the UK to be a science superpower, we also want to be a collaborative science superpower.

And above all it means certainty for business from financial services to our world-leading manufacturers – our car industry – certainty for those working in high skilled jobs in firms and factories across the whole country.

Because there will be no palisade of tariffs on Jan 1.

And there will be no non-tariff barriers to trade.

And instead there will be a giant free trade zone of which we will at once be a member.

And at the same time be able to do our own free trade deals as one UK, whole and entire, England, NI, Scotland and Wales together.

And I should stress this deal was done by a huge negotiating team from every part of the UK, and it will benefit every part of our United Kingdom, helping to unite and level up across the country.

And so I say again directly to our EU friends and partners, I think this deal

means a new stability and a new certainty in what has sometimes been a fractious and difficult relationship.

We will be your friend, your ally, your supporter and indeed – never let it be forgotten – your number one market.

Because although we have left the EU this country will remain culturally, emotionally, historically, strategically and geologically attached to Europe, not least through the four million EU nationals who have requested to settle in the UK over the last four years and who make an enormous contribution to our country and to our lives.

And I say to all of you at home.

At the end of this toughest of years.

That our focus in the weeks ahead is of course on defeating the pandemic.

And on beating coronavirus and rebuilding our economy.

And delivering jobs across the country.

And I am utterly confident that we can and will do it.

By today we have vaccinated almost 800,000 people and we have also today resolved a question that has bedevilled our politics for decades.

And it is up to us all together.

As a newly and truly independent nation.

To realise the immensity of this moment and to make the most of it.

Happy Christmas to you all.

That's the good news from Brussels – now for the sprouts.