

Speech: Townhall meeting for British nationals – opening remarks

Hello everyone. For those who haven't met me, my name is Iain Lindsay and I am the British Ambassador to Hungary. Thank you for coming this evening.

Grateful to Szabolcs Takács, State Secretary for European Union Affairs at the Prime Minister's Office, for representing the Hungarian Government.

Hungary is home to 5-10,000 Brits, therefore it is important for us to give you an opportunity to hear the latest information on EU Exit, both from the UK and the Hungarian Governments. And even more importantly, it's important that we listen to your thoughts and concerns.

Before I launch into the main part of my comments this evening, I want to flag up three things:

I'd like to encourage you to regularly check our embassy's website on [GOV.UK](#), including our [Living in Hungary guide](#) guide and follow our social media channels, [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), to have the most up-to-date information about our departure from the EU.

You will find little cards on your seats with all the relevant links, including a link to a [survey](#) where we would welcome your feedback on this event.

Many of those who cannot be here today have asked that we live stream this event so that information is shared as widely as possible. I am pleased to confirm that we are doing this, so please note that recording will take place throughout the event. We will also publish a summary of this event on our website, so that you can return to any of the questions we discuss today.

Finally, about the format of the event: following my comments I will ask State Secretary Takács to say a few words on behalf of the Hungarian Government. Then we will open the floor for questions.

I know that the EU referendum decision has caused considerable uncertainty, and in many cases disappointment, for you. These are difficult times but we have worked hard with our EU partners to reach agreement on the Withdrawal Agreement and a Political Declaration.

From the very beginning of this process, Prime Minister Theresa May has said that safeguarding the rights of UK nationals living in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK was her top priority.

This evening, I would like to give you an update on the agreement reached on citizens' rights. I will also speak about your situation should we not be able to reach an overall agreement with the EU, which I want to stress is neither our, nor the EU's, wish or intention.

Withdrawal Agreement

The Withdrawal Agreement will ensure our smooth and orderly exit from the UK, including securing the rights of the 1 million+ UK nationals in the EU and 3 million+ EU citizens in the UK. The European Council endorsed this Agreement in November. Our Parliament was due to vote on the agreement in December, but the PM decided to postpone that vote until January. That vote is now due on 15 January.

I know this is a period of uncertainty and I appreciate it's very difficult for you – it is for us all. As a responsible government we are preparing for all potential scenarios. I will speak about this later.

If Parliament votes in favour of the Withdrawal Agreement, it will be implemented by the end of March and the result will be:

- a time-limited implementation period, lasting from when we exit the EU until 31 December 2020. During the implementation period, EU law will continue to apply to the UK. As such, during that period UK nationals will continue to be able to travel, work and live freely in any member state, as is currently the case

UK nationals already living legally in Hungary will be able to remain on broadly the same basis after the UK leaves the EU. That means if a UK national is legally residing in Hungary by 31 December 2020, they will be able to continue doing so afterwards. And not only to reside, but to continue working, studying, being retired, or whatever they were doing before. This means:

- you will have the right to “family reunification” – that is bringing your family members to Hungary, which I know is really important to many of you. So if you are resident in Hungary, you will be able to bring your family members to Hungary even after our exit from the EU. This applies to children, including those born after exit day, dependant parents and dependant grandparents. It also covers partners, including spouses, registered partners, and partners >in a proven long-term relationship, where the relationship existed before 31 December 2020

The UK and the EU will continue to aggregate social security contributions made both before and after the end of the implementation period. Those who have paid into a system – for example pensions – and may pay in in the future, will have their contributions protected.

In addition, we will continue to pay an uprated UK State Pension to individuals resident in EU Member States, and, in accordance with EU rules, provide associated healthcare cover in the EU.

The UK and EU will also protect the right to export relevant benefits (e.g. child benefit and disability benefits) to both EU Member States and the UK, as under the current EU rules.

Current healthcare arrangements will continue for those citizens who are

legally resident in Hungary by 31 December 2020, including the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), planned treatments and health care reimbursement arrangements for pensioners (the S1 route).

You will also retain your right to run or establish a business in Hungary.

All of these provisions will apply equally to Hungarian citizens in the UK.

So what is not included in the Withdrawal Agreement? There are some issues we haven't yet been able to agree on with the EU, which we hope to discuss in the next round. For example, I know that the right to continue to have the ability to move freely around all 27 remaining EU27 countries is important to many of you. We will seek to discuss this in the context of our future partnership.

No deal

Up to now we have been talking about the situation in the event that the British Parliament approves the deal we have negotiated. I am however conscious that many of you will be aware that Parliament may not approve the deal, and that it is possible that the UK may leave the EU without a deal.

Delivering the deal negotiated with the EU remains the Government's top priority. This has not changed. However, the Government must prepare for every eventuality, including a no deal scenario. With less than three months until our exit from the EU, we have reached the point where we need to accelerate and intensify these preparations.

The Government has now published 106 pieces of advice on different subjects to help businesses, citizens and consumers to prepare for 29 March in the event of a no-deal scenario. These are available on the government website. They are called "technical notices". Those dealing with passports and driving licences might be of particular interest to people here.

Our objective in a no-deal scenario is to minimise disruption by taking unilateral action to prioritise continuity and stability. Stability in a no-deal scenario partly depends on the EU taking a similar, non-disruptive approach to planning.

You may be aware that on 21 September, the Prime Minister confirmed that in the event of no-deal, all EU citizens resident in the UK before 29 March 2019 would be able to stay. And we are asking Member States to respond to the guarantees we have given to EU citizens and confirm that UK nationals can stay, even in a 'no deal' scenario too. I am very pleased to say Hungary has already done that, about which I am sure State Secretary Takács will wish to say more.

I appreciate this is a period of uncertainty and many of you want more information and advice. We want to help you prepare for all scenarios and are committed to ensuring relevant information is available in a timely, transparent and accessible way. Further information will continue to be made available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) over the coming weeks.

If you only take one thing away with you today, it should be to have your affairs in order. If you haven't already done so, register with the Hungarian authorities. Any deal will only apply to those who are lawfully resident in Hungary, which means you have to be registered if you have been residing in Hungary for 3 months. This is a long-standing requirement.

In order to register, you have to submit your application to the relevant regional directorate of the Hungarian Immigration and Asylum Office by presenting a valid travel document or personal identification document alongside with the documents that prove you have the right to residence, e.g. in case of employment the relevant documentary evidence provided by your employer. The application fee is HUF 1,000. You will find further information in English on the website of the [Immigration and Asylum Office](#).

I'd also like to encourage you again to follow our embassy Facebook and Twitter pages. Both accounts are called 'UK in Hungary', and should be easy to find. But details of all of these are on the cards on your seats.

We're constantly working to improve these events. Therefore, we would really appreciate your feedback. We will share the link to the online feedback form on our social media channels.

Finally, we understand that this is a difficult time for many people, but we continue to work together with the Hungarian Government to ensure that you are able to continue to live your lives as you have done to date, and that you have the best information possible.

Thank you very much for your attention, let me now give the floor to State Secretary Takács.