

Speech: United at home, stronger abroad

It is a pleasure to be with you all this afternoon in Broughton and I want to thank Airbus for their hospitality today.

This company is a great success story for Wales, for the United Kingdom and for Europe: the biggest private sector employer here in Broughton, but with two-fifths of its workers commuting each day from homes in England and part of a European enterprise now operating in five continents and employing people from 130 different nationalities. Airbus is a vivid example from the business world of how diversity in unity can make for global success.

Those same characteristics have defined the success of the United Kingdom.

The different nations that make up our country have had a long, often uneasy history. The castles just a few miles down the road from here at Chirk, Holt and Caergwle remind us of ancient quarrels.

But the shared experience and solidarity of our four nations at times of great success and grave danger alike have come to represent one of the most powerful and enduring symbols of freedom, liberty and democracy anywhere in the world and the proudest citizen of Aberdeen, Plymouth, Coleraine or Broughton can take huge pride in also being part of the United Kingdom – a union greater than the sum of its parts.

And now, as we prepare to leave the European Union, preserving and strengthening that union of the United Kingdom matters more than ever.

As we negotiate a new deep and special partnership with our friends and neighbours in Europe and forge a new role for the United Kingdom in the world, we must work for a future that fosters wealth-creation, opportunity and innovation in every part of the United Kingdom, and which strengthens the sense of security, belonging and solidarity in all communities, building a country that really does work for everyone.

The vote to leave the EU

And we as a country are at a crossroads in our history.

We face a choice: a choice that represents the difference between a prosperous, secure nation that is united at home and stronger abroad, and a poorer country that is divided at home and a weaker player on the global stage.

Now let me be clear at the outset: this choice is not about whether we leave the European Union.

As many of you here will know, I voted and campaigned hard to remain in the EU – as did many people in this country.

But I recognise as indeed do our 27 partners that people in the UK took a democratic decision to leave the EU – and that is what we must now focus our energies on delivering, seeking to minimise the risks and to seize the opportunities.

So the choice is therefore not whether we leave, but how we choose to do so.

We could leave as a nation divided; a country split; an economy disjointed – struggling to forge a unified consensus on the way ahead.

But there are opportunities too – opportunities we can seize if we come together, unite, and develop into that stronger, global Britain which we can be.

There were many different reasons why people voted to leave the European Union in 2016.

But reflecting on that campaign, I think that above all else, people throughout this country sought to regain a feeling of control, not just control over our laws, but over our lives too, and the people we elect into office.

And when you talk to people on the doorstep, it's clear that that vote expressed not just a rejection of membership of the European Union, but a demand to bring decision making and accountability closer to home, to restore a sense of belonging in communities, a feeling of connection between the elector and the elected.

So yes, we have to ensure, as we are determined to do, that Brexit means more powers going to the devolved governments and not fewer.

But I believe too that to renew that sense of connection between citizen and government, we need to press on too with our broader mission to devolve greater freedom, more power to act to cities, towns and counties in all parts of the United Kingdom. And I hope that the devolved governments will choose to take that approach too. After all, for someone in Broughton or Llandudno or Welshpool, Cardiff can seem as distant as London; from the perspective of Orkney, priorities may look very different from those of Central Scotland.

Our aim should be nothing less than to see our entire country coming together and having their voices heard. It means people here in Wales, as well as in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England – and it means our villages, towns cities and communities throughout the United Kingdom all having a voice too.

Our commitment to devolution

At the heart of the Conservative political tradition is both patriotism, loyalty to the special, shared union of the United Kingdom, but also a commitment not just to individual rights but to the vital importance of family and community, of village, town and county in enabling individual men and women to find meaning, value and fulfilment in their lives.

As Edmund Burke put it more than 200 years ago:

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link by which we proceed to love of our country and of mankind”.

I suspect that most of us here derive our sense of who we are from many different sources – from our family, from where we live, perhaps from a sports club, choral society or community group that we support, in many cases from our religious faith, and of course from our nation.

And in the United Kingdom we know that there is no contradiction between being an ardent Welsh or Scottish patriot and being a committed supporter of the Union. If I needed any reminder of that truth, it was when the Secretary of State for Scotland was gloating to me about the rugby result on Saturday.

Looking back to the last century, I think – being honest – that my party was too slow to recognise that the increasing calls for devolution and decentralisation represented a genuine shift in public mood.

But I think if you look at our record in government in the last eight years demonstrates that we have got the message.

The two Scotland Acts, in 2012 and 2016, have made Holyrood one of the most powerful parliaments of its kind in the world.

City deals in Scotland – backed by more than £1 billion of UK Government spending – have now either been agreed or committed to for all of Scotland’s seven cities.

The Wales Act is delivering a stronger, fairer, more accountable devolution settlement for Wales.

City deals for Cardiff and Swansea and the future North Wales Growth Deal are supporting the industries and jobs of tomorrow.

The passage of English Votes for English Laws at Westminster means that MPs representing English voters rightly have the final say on issues which matter directly to them and their constituents.

We have created new combined authorities with elected mayors across England – putting power firmly in the hands of local people in the West Midlands, the West of England, Tees Valley, Cambridgeshire, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield.

And this government will continue to strive to restore devolution in Northern Ireland, and will remain fully committed to the Belfast Agreement. We will continue to govern in the interests of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland, and to uphold the totality of relationships embodied in that agreement, both East-West and North-South. And we shall stand by the commitments in the Joint Report between the UK and the European Union that was agreed in December last year.

But while we can take pride in that record of decentralising power, we can and should go further to drive forward both the economic and the political regeneration of our country.

So we are working with local authorities to help them co-ordinate their own economic plans with our UK-wide national industrial strategy – bringing together local businesses and leaders to deliver growth, enterprise and job creation in every part of our country.

We are supporting combined authorities located around our English cities to adopt elected mayors, should they wish to do so.

We will bring forward a Borderlands Growth Deal – including all councils on both the Scottish and English sides of the border – to help secure prosperity in southern Scotland.

We will build on the future North Wales Growth Deal by also fostering opportunities between Welsh cities and the rest of the UK, for example by linking economic development opportunities in Cardiff, Newport and Bristol.

And we have committed to looking at a city deal for Belfast.

Our commitment to the union

Now at the same time, we are unapologetically committed to the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom.

So, alongside those initiatives to bring more powers closer to the people, we are working to ensure that the institutions and the power of the United Kingdom are used in a way that benefits people in every part of our country.

For a country that not only has a shared past, but continues today to draw strengths from all parts of the union.

There are more than 31,000 UK civil servants based here in Wales, including in our new UK Government Hub in Cardiff.

Eight out of ten goods lorries leaving Wales go to the rest of the UK, highlighting the importance of our United Kingdom wide market.

Bombardier's factory in Belfast has a supply chain of 800 companies throughout the UK and Ireland, supporting thousands of high-skilled jobs.

It is from the Department for International Development's joint headquarters in East Kilbride, Scotland that the 'United Kingdom's international work to vaccinate children against killer diseases, to educate girls and to provide clean water and sanitation to people who desperately need it is being driven.

And of course our base on the Clyde, home to thousands of shipbuilding jobs, is central to the UK's defence capabilities.

Put simply: we are all more prosperous and more secure when we all work together for our common good as one United Kingdom.

Now leaving the EU presents many challenges for our centuries-old union story – and opportunities too.

And some want to use it as an excuse to loosen these ties that bind us together – even sever them completely. Such an outcome would leave every one of our four nations both weaker and poorer.

Why we need frameworks

The task before us isn't an easy one, it is complex.

How do we allow greater control across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland over the things that affect them separately – while preserving the things that affect us all collectively as we return powers from Brussels to the United Kingdom.

How do we ensure that a new wave of devolution delivers for the people of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland – but at the same time protects the essence of our union?

For a start, we have all – the UK government and the devolved governments together – agreed that we will need to have frameworks that break down which powers should sit where once they have returned from Brussels.

And that is a sensible and constructive approach – because these powers are not all the same.

Some are very obviously for the devolved governments and parliaments to exercise, and don't need any involvement on a UK-wide basis.

For example, the devolved governments are best placed to manage the safety and quality of the water they drink, as well as looking after and caring for their natural environment.

At the same time, there are other powers that are yes for the devolved governments to shape according to their own needs or ambitions and where they don't need legislation to underpin how what they do relates to the other nations of the UK, but where it would still be in everybody's interests to agree a looser form of cooperation – such as Memoranda of Understanding – between the devolved and UK governments.

For instance, we will need to continue to work together on important domestic policy areas, for example by ensuring that a vital organ donated by someone in one part of the UK can be used to treat a patient in another part of the United Kingdom.

Now those powers should rightly be devolved, not centralised – and that is the offer we have put forward on the table.

But on the other hand, some powers are clearly related to the UK as a whole and will need to continue to apply in the same way across all four nations in order to protect consumers and businesses who buy and sell across the UK, in all parts of what we might call the United Kingdom's common market. That

market is one of the fundamental expressions of the constitutional integrity that underpins our existence as a union.

The Government will protect that vital common market of the UK. And by retaining UK frameworks where necessary we will retain our ability not only to act in the national interest when we need to, but to do so with a unity of purpose that places the prosperity and security of all of our citizens, no matter where they're from or where they were born, to the fore.

For example, at present EU law means that our farmers and other food producers only need to comply with one set of package labelling and hygiene rules.

Four different sets of rules in different parts of the UK would only make it more difficult and more expensive for a cheesemaker in Monmouthshire to sell to customers in Bristol or for a cattle farmer in Aberdeenshire to sell their beef in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Now these are everyday issues affecting how people live their life – they are issues that people in the UK expect us to get on and agree in the clear interests of families and businesses in every part of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland alike.

So that is exactly what the UK government stands ready, waiting and willing to do.

They are the steps that will ensure the United Kingdom's market continues to work as it always has done:

- to ensure that the factory in Paisley can continue to sell freely to Preston;
- that the family firm in Swansea can continue to buy supplies from Swindon;
- and customers in Londonderry can still place their order in Leeds, without any extra red tape or expense.

And I want to say one thing further. The Prime Minister has been clear throughout the negotiations with the European Union that we want to preserve the standards that protect employment and workers rights, to deliver consumer protection, and safeguard the environment.

And that means keeping these high standards across the whole of the United Kingdom, and for our part as the United Kingdom government, we are committed to working in partnership with the devolved governments to ensure those standards are universal in all four parts of our country.

Clause Eleven

Now, it is fair to say that the road to agreeing how we go forward together has not always been a smooth and straight one.

I, along with my predecessors in the Cabinet Office and the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, have engaged closely with the devolved governments in order to understand their concerns and to respond to them.

Those concerns have been expressed clearly – and often forthrightly – throughout those conversations!

But we have continued to talk – both at political and official level – and, even more importantly, we have continued to listen.

The Prime Minister's first visit after entering Downing Street was to Edinburgh.

Two of my first phone calls upon moving across to the Cabinet Office last month were to the Deputy First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister of Wales.

I met them both in person during my first weeks in this role, in Cardiff and in Edinburgh – to underline my personal commitment to engaging constructively and striking the agreement that is in all our interests.

While they have always acknowledged that the Government has said we want to see many of the powers from Brussels go straight to the devolved governments, there has been a question throughout about what our starting point should be.

Should those powers sit at a UK-wide level while we agree the future frameworks?

Or should they sit at a devolved level while we then agree the future frameworks?

The Government has listened to the different points of view – from the Scottish and Welsh Governments, from Welsh and Scottish colleagues in both Houses of Parliament at Westminster and to views expressed in the devolved parliaments.

And just last week, we held constructive discussions in London where we put forward a considerable offer. A commitment that the vast majority of powers returning from Brussels will start off in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast – and not in Whitehall.

And let me be in no doubt: this would mean a very big change to the EU Withdrawal Bill that is before Parliament and a significant step forward in these negotiations.

It would put on the face of the Bill what we have always said was our intention: wide-ranging devolution not just away from Brussels, but from

Westminster too.

And if accepted, this offer puts beyond doubt our commitment to a smooth and orderly departure from the European Union, in a way that doesn't just respect the devolution settlements, but strengthens and enhances them.

So our proposal is to amend the Bill before Parliament to make clear that while frameworks are being agreed, the presumption would now be that powers returning from the EU should sit at a devolved level.

Westminster would only be involved where, to protect the UK common market or to meet our international obligations, we needed a pause – I stress pause – to give the governments time to design and put in place a UK-wide framework.

As I have said before, we expect to be able to secure agreement with the devolved governments about what frameworks should – or should not – apply to each power.

And where powers do need to be returned to a UK-wide framework, we will maintain the ability for the UK Parliament to legislate to do so.

Just as the current provisions within the EU Withdrawal Bill on releasing powers to devolved governments are intended to be by consensus and agreement with the devolved governments themselves, so we should expect this new, inverted power to operate in the same way – by consensus and by agreement.

Nor would this proposed arrangement prevent the devolved governments from doing anything that is already within their competence.

At the same time, our proposal offers an important protection too. It would ensure that, if there were not to be an agreement – and not having an agreement on a framework would put at risk the smooth and orderly exit that we all need – the UK Parliament could protect the essential interests of businesses and consumers in every part of the Kingdom.

A deal is there to be done.

So I am clear that it is in the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom to agree a way forward that:

- fully respects the devolved settlements.
- preserves the integrity of the United Kingdom market.
- and maintains the UK's ability to secure an agreement with the European Union on our future partnership.

Our new proposal is a reflection of the seriousness of our desire to strike agreements with the devolved governments.

Our seriousness about delivering more powers to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, while at the same time ensuring there are no new barriers for people across the nations of the United Kingdom.

So families can continue to buy and sell freely, so businesses won't face extra bureaucracy and higher costs, so people face minimal disruption to their everyday lives, and maximum certainty that things can carry on as normal, as we look ahead to the future.

So I hope that the talks that are now continuing between the UK and devolved governments will lead in coming weeks to an agreement that can be taken forward in the EU Withdrawal Bill and which we can all welcome as being to our mutual benefit.

Seizing the opportunities

And so as we look to the future, this is the balance that, working together, we can strike a strong and fair devolution settlement for our devolved partners, with powers sitting at the most appropriate level and common UK frameworks where necessary, with our constitutional integrity intact.

By making that kind of agreement, we can truly become that United Kingdom we need to be here at home – and that greater, stronger United Kingdom abroad.

For that is the task we now face. Building a global Britain that is fit for the future, equipped not only to tackle head on future global challenges, but confidently seize the new opportunities available to us as well and so when we do speak and act on the world stage we do so with one authoritative voice, which reflects and represents the interests of all four nations. A country that has the strength and flexibility needed to survive, and indeed thrive on the international stage.

And with our considerable existing strengths, I am confident this future can be a secure and prosperous one:

We are the sixth largest economy in the world, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, the biggest European defence spender in NATO, with significant military capabilities and a proven readiness to deploy them in defence of our interests. A key player in a highly developed set of security relationships such as Five Eyes.

Our country has:

One of the best diplomatic services in the world and one of its biggest aid and development programmes.

We have world leading universities that attract the best talent from around the globe; more Nobel Laureates than any country bar the United States; a globally competitive economy, with some of the most exciting burgeoning industries such as digital and fintec; a language that is the language of the world, and, thanks to institutions like the BBC and the NHS, the greatest soft power of any nation on the planet.

But just imagine if we spoke with four conflicting voices: each would be weaker, fainter and misheard as our global competitors shouted louder with a strong, single voice, and a divided country at home would be weaker, less secure, and less prosperous overseas.

The unity that exists between our four nations gives us a scale of ambition none of the four of us could possess alone.

We need to use our collective economic clout and the experience and reach of our diplomatic network in the United Kingdom to sell Scotch whisky and engineering expertise, Welsh cheeses and mini-computers, buses and linens from Northern Ireland right around the world.

And maintaining the common market of the United Kingdom will give us the heft to lead the charge for common regulatory standards at a global level. Having the right framework in place at home means we can be at the forefront of developing the new regulatory environment we need for the exciting technologies of tomorrow.

And what we want is innovators and producers right across Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland to be able to get ahead of the curve and edge ahead of their global competitors.

And it's also by sticking together that we'll be able to provide global leadership, discharging our international obligations, standing up for human rights, democratic values and the rule of law and defending the rules-based international order that is so vital to our security and our prosperity together.

Conclusion

It would be easy to loosen the bonds that connect us.

But with a strong, fair devolution settlement that ensures powers and decision-making are exerted as close to people as is practical, I believe a sense of trust can be restored between the people of the United Kingdom and those they choose to govern on their behalf.

And with common frameworks in place that maintain the integrity of our union, we can ensure that we continue to speak with that powerful voice globally.

Each of those two principles strengthens the other.

So let us seize the moment and focus on that prize that is on offer:

a union greater than the sum of its parts; a country that remains a strong, global leader; a United Kingdom at home, and an active, force for good in the world.

Thank you very much indeed.