

Statement to Parliament: SoS, Dominic Raab statement on the White Paper on Legislating for the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and the EU

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the White Paper which has been published today, setting out the Government's plans for legislating for the Withdrawal Agreement and the implementation period.

On Friday the 29th of March 2019, the UK will leave the European Union, giving effect to the historic decision taken by the British people in the 2016 referendum.

This Government is committed to delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit.

That's why we've already passed the EU (Withdrawal) Act through Parliament, so we are ensuring our statute book functions after... exit, whatever the outcome of the negotiations.

I am grateful to the House, and the other place, for the many hours of scrutiny devoted to that vital piece of legislation.

We are now embarking on the next step in the process of delivering that smooth Brexit for the people and businesses of this country.

Mr Speaker, since June last year, the UK has been negotiating with the EU to decide on the terms of our withdrawal.

We have made substantial progress: protecting the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU, deciding on the terms of the financial settlement, agreeing a strictly time-limited implementation period.

Most of the Withdrawal Agreement, according to the EU side, around 80%, has now been agreed with our EU partners, and we have isolated outstanding issues for further focused negotiation.

I will be meeting Michel Barnier again on Thursday, to take forward these negotiations at this critical time.

We have already agreed a financial settlement, estimated at between £35-39 billion, well below the figures being bandied around by some when we started this negotiation.

The implementation period is finite, it allows for the negotiation and conclusion of free trade deals.

Many of these arrangements will require new domestic legislation to deliver them into UK law.

And that is why, last November, we announced our intention to bring forward a new piece of primary legislation to implement the Withdrawal Agreement in UK law.

So today, we are publishing a White Paper setting out our proposals for this important legislation, which will be introduced once the negotiations have concluded and Parliament has approved the final deal.

Our expectation is to reach agreement in October. And under the terms of the EU (Withdrawal) Act, Parliament will have its say on the final deal.

Our expectation is, if approved at that point, we will we bring forward the legislation so that it can be in place for when we leave the EU on the 29th of March 2019.

So in setting out our proposals today, we are giving Parliament the opportunity to scrutinise the plans well ahead of the Bill's introduction, given the need to enact the legislation in the time available, mindful of the importance of maximum scrutiny in this House.

By publishing the White Paper today, the Government is providing further certainty to people and businesses here in the UK and indeed across the EU.

And it also sends a clear signal to the European Union that the United Kingdom is a reliable dependable, negotiating partner, delivering on the commitments it has made across the negotiating table.

Of course, while we are making good progress, discussions are ongoing in various areas.

And that means that some parts of the Bill will only become clearer as we settle the remaining parts of the Withdrawal Agreement.

In light of that, the White Paper we published today focuses on those parts of the Withdrawal Agreement where the text is already agreed.

Let me take them in turn.

Mr Speaker, the first priority of the UK in negotiating our withdrawal from the EU was to reach agreement on the rights of our citizens.

That includes the 3.5 million EU citizens that live in the UK and are valued members of their communities and play an integral part in the life of this country.

Likewise, the approximately one million UK nationals who currently live in the EU are equally valued by their host countries and communities.

The agreement reached on citizens' rights will allow EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU to live their lives broadly as they do now and will enable families who have built their lives in the EU and UK to stay together.

The most important next step will be to provide a continued right of residence for those citizens.

EU citizens lawfully residing in the UK on the 31st of December 2020 will be able to stay.

And this month, the Home Office published further details about how EU citizens and their families can obtain settled status in the UK.

And that statement confirms that the Settlement Scheme will be simple and straightforward for EU citizens and their families to secure their long-term status in this country.

The Bill will ensure EU citizens can rely on the rights set out in the Withdrawal Agreement, and enforce them in UK courts.

It will also establish an independent monitoring authority to oversee the UK's implementation of the deal on citizens' rights, providing further reassurance to citizens.

Mr Speaker, all EU Member States must implement the Agreement in full and provide certainty to UK nationals on the continent.

And, as the Home Secretary recently stated, we now need to know more of the details on how each Member State will fulfil their obligations and implement their side of the agreement.

And we will be pressing further on those details over the summer.

The next chapter of the paper deals with the strictly time-limited implementation period that the UK agreed with the EU in March.

The UK will leave the EU on the 29th of March 2019.

After this, we have agreed an implementation period that will ensure that people and businesses will only have to plan for one set of changes as we move towards our future relationship.

From the 30th of March 2019 until the 31st of December 2020 common rules will remain in place, with EU law continuing to apply, and businesses will be able to trade on the same terms as they do now.

During this period we will not be a Member State, and will have the flexibility we need to strike new trade deals around the world, something many argued we would not be able to achieve in the negotiations.

In order to legislate for the implementation period, we must ensure that the statute book, the UK statute book, continues to reflect the relevant EU law, as it applies to the UK during this time-limited period.

As the House will know, the current mechanism for bringing EU law into UK law is the European Communities Act 1972. Under the EU (Withdrawal) Act, that will be repealed on the 29th of March 2019.

Therefore, as set out in the White Paper, the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill will contain a time-limited provision so that parts of the ECA are saved until the 31st of December 2020.

These changes will ensure that our statute book functions properly throughout the implementation period, according with the agreement we have made with the EU.

Turning to the financial settlement, the structure of that was agreed in December on the basis that it would sit alongside our future partnership.

And as we have said from the start, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. That is in keeping with Article 50. It is in keeping with the guidelines that have been given to the EU for the negotiation.

We will have a Framework for our Future Relationship with the EU, alongside the Withdrawal Agreement.

And our approach to that future partnership is set out in our White Paper published earlier this month.

There must be a firm commitment in the Withdrawal Agreement requiring the framework for the future relationship to be translated into legal text as soon as possible.

It is one part of the whole deal we are doing with our EU partners.

And of course, if one party fails to honour its side of the overall bargain, there will be consequences for the deal as a whole, and that includes the financial settlement.

In addition, we have agreed an obligation for both parties to act in good faith through the application of the Withdrawal Agreement.

And the White Paper published today explains that the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill will include a standing service provision to allow the Government to meet the commitments of the financial settlement.

In the interests of transparency and oversight, it also includes proposals to enhance the existing scrutiny for the payments made to the EU.

Mr Speaker, this White Paper sets out our approach to delivering the Withdrawal Agreement and implementation period into law.

I look forward to discussing all of the proposals with Honourable Members across the House.

It is a necessary part of leaving the European Union and ensuring a smooth and orderly departure.

It provides the clarity and certainty to EU citizens living here and UK nationals abroad that their rights will be properly protected.

It will enact the time-limited implementation period, giving businesses greater certainty, giving the public finality with respect to our relationship with the EU.

And it provides for the appropriate means for paying of the financial settlement.

Above all, with 80% of the Withdrawal Agreement settled with our EU friends the White Paper is another key milestone on the UK's path to leaving the EU.

And I commend this statement to the House.