

EU Exit: Update on negotiations and the work of the Joint Committee

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the Government's negotiations with the European Union on our future relationship, and the work of the UK-EU Joint Committee established under the Withdrawal Agreement.

First, the talks on a new trade agreement. We had hoped to conclude a Canada-style free trade agreement before the transition period ends on 31 December this year.

As things stand, that will not now happen.

We remain absolutely committed to securing a Canada-style FTA, but there needs to be a fundamental change in approach from the EU if the process is to get back on track. I have come to the House at the first available opportunity to explain why and how we have reached this point.

Mr Speaker, we have been clear since the summer that we saw the 15th of October – that is, last Thursday – as the target date for reaching an agreement with the EU.

The Prime Minister and the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed on 3 October that our negotiating teams should work 'intensively' to bridge the remaining gaps between us. We made clear that we were willing to talk every day.

But I have to report to the House that this intensification was not forthcoming. The EU was only willing to conduct negotiations on fewer than half the days available, and would not engage on all the outstanding issues.

Moreover, the EU has refused to discuss legal texts in any area, as it has done since the summer. Indeed, it is almost incredible that we have reached this point in the negotiations without any common legal texts of any kind.

Then, on October 15, EU Heads of State and Government gathered for the European Council. The conclusions of that Council reaffirmed the EU's original negotiating mandate, dropped a reference to 'intensive' talks that had been in the draft, and declared that all future moves in this negotiation had to be made by the UK.

Although some attempts were made to soften this message by some EU leaders, the President of the European Council reaffirmed those conclusions as authoritative on Friday.

This unfortunate sequence of events has in effect ended the trade negotiations, because it leaves no basis on which we can actually find agreement. There is no point in negotiations proceeding as long as the EU sticks with this position. Such talks would be meaningless and would take us

no nearer to finding a workable solution.

Mr Speaker, that is the situation we face. That is why the Prime Minister had to make clear on October 16 that: The EU had refused to negotiate seriously for much of the last few months; The EU had now at the European Council explicitly ruled out a free trade agreement with us like the one it has with Canada; And therefore that this country should get ready for the 1st of January 2021 with arrangements that are more like Australia's, based on simple principles of global free trade.

If the EU wants to change this situation, and I hope it will, it needs to make a fundamental change in its approach and make clear it has done so.

It has to be serious about talking intensively, on all issues, and trying to reach a conclusion.

But it also needs to accept that it is dealing with an independent and sovereign country. We have tried to be clear from the start that we would not be able to reach an agreement inconsistent with that status. I do not think, Mr Speaker, you could accuse us of keeping this a secret.

And yet the proposals the EU has discussed with us in recent weeks, which it presents as compromises, are simply not consistent with our new sovereign status. So Mr Speaker, while I do not doubt they are well intentioned, we cannot accept proposals that would require us to: Provide full permanent access to our fishing waters with quotas substantially unchanged to those imposed by EU membership; Operate a state aid system essentially the same as the EU's, with great discretion given to the EU to retaliate against us if it thought we were deviating from it; And more broadly, stay in step with laws proposed and adopted by the EU across areas of critical national importance.

Mr Speaker, to repeat: we have been asking for no more than what has been offered in trade agreements to other global trading countries such as Canada – terms, moreover, which the EU said last year it had no difficulty offering to us.

We are not asking for special favours reflecting our 45 years as a member state. Quite the reverse. But if even this is impossible for the EU, then I must inform the House that we will be leaving on Australian-style terms and trading on the basis of WTO rules.

With just ten weeks left until the end of the transition period, that is not my preferred outcome. There will be some turbulence. But we have not come so far to falter now that we are so close to reclaiming our sovereignty: in control of our own borders and fishing grounds, setting our own laws, thriving as an independent, free trading nation and embracing the freedoms that will flow as a result.

It is therefore important, Mr Speaker, that I turn now to the preparations we are intensifying for the end of the transition period, whether we have a free trade agreement or otherwise.

I am in no way blithe or blasé about the challenges ahead, particularly given

the additional challenges of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, but leaving the EU on Australian terms is an outcome for which we are increasingly well-prepared.

Ever since the UK decided it would leave the Single Market and the Customs Union at the end of the transition period, government and businesses alike have been working hard to prepare for the new customs procedures that were the inevitable result – that had to happen irrespective of any future relationship we struck with the EU.

I would like to congratulate businesses for the resourcefulness they have shown so far and urge them to continue responding as energetically, flexibly and imaginatively to the challenges of change – and also preparing for the opportunities ahead, including those stemming from our new free trade deals. The agreement with Japan struck by my Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for International Trade, grants far more favourable access to the world's third-biggest economy than we had as an EU member.

I would also like to put on record my particular thanks to the road haulage industry and customs intermediaries sector for their constructive engagement with Government, including at our round-table last week.

This week the Prime Minister and I will be speaking again to business leaders to discuss their preparations and plans for life outside the EU. We will continue to listen to their concerns, and redouble our efforts to help them adjust and prosper.

The 'X0' Cabinet Committee meets daily with an operational focus on business readiness. We continue to work closely with our partners in the devolved administrations to ensure every part of the UK is ready for the end of the transition period.

In these final ten weeks we are also intensifying our public information campaign. Every firm will find the information it needs on new import and export rules between Great Britain and the EU on gov.uk/transition, and HMRC is today writing to 200,000 traders that do business with the EU to reinforce understanding of the new customs and tax rules, and how to deal with them.

We are putting in place IT systems to help reduce the amount of change for flow across borders; we are giving businesses access to customs professionals to help with new ways of working; and we have planned how to fast-track vital goods in the first few weeks to get around EU bureaucracy.

To give traders extra clarity about the new rules, we have published and already updated our Border Operating Model; we have announced £705 million worth of investment in jobs, infrastructure and technology at the border; and we have strengthened our maritime security to protect our fishing fleets and safeguard our seas.

In addition, Mr Speaker, to the steps we are taking ourselves, we are also continuing our work with the EU in the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee – and I would like to update the House on its latest meeting which took place

earlier this morning.

Coming only three weeks after the last meeting, I am pleased to report that in this forum, at least, the approach from the EU is very constructive. There is a clear imperative on both sides to find solutions and we remain committed to working collaboratively with the EU through the Joint Committee processes.

At our last meeting, in Brussels, I agreed with my co-chair, Vice President Maroš Šefčovič, that we would intensify discussions to implement the Withdrawal Agreement, primarily around citizens' rights and the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Our officials have since held numerous sessions, including two Specialised Committees.

Today in London, I reiterated the UK's commitment to upholding all our obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement and protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in every respect.

We agreed that we will publish a joint update on citizens' rights in the UK and EU, and I am pleased to confirm that almost four million EU citizens in the UK have now received status under our scheme.

We also discussed our work to implement the Northern Ireland Protocol. The UK outlined the steps we are taking to implement new agri-food arrangements. We acknowledged the EU's concerns about appropriate monitoring of implementation, and have a better understanding of their requests and the reasoning behind them. We confirmed that the Specialised Committee on Other Separation Provisions would meet this month, and took note of good progress discussing Gibraltar and Sovereign Base issues.

While much remains to be resolved before the end of December, we have made substantial progress on implementation. Both sides are committed to an accelerated tempo of discussions via the Specialised Committees. I look forward to further pragmatic engagement with the Vice President in the weeks ahead, and want to put on record my appreciation for the constructive tone and spirit with which he and his team have approached our discussions.

Mr Speaker, in his statement on Friday the Prime Minister looked ahead to 2021 as a year of recovery and renewal, when this government will be focused on tackling COVID-19 and building back better. We are getting ready to do what the British people asked of us – to forge our own path, and not acquiesce to anyone else's agenda.

On the negotiations, our door is not closed. It remains ajar, and I very much hope that the EU will fundamentally change its position. But come what may, we will take back control. And so Mr Speaker: four and a half years since the referendum, and with the finishing line now in sight, I commend this statement to the House.

[Defence Secretary announces MOD Science and Technology Strategy 2020](#)

News story

The MOD Science and Technology Strategy 2020 sets out how MOD will secure and maintain scientific and technological advantage for the future.



We are living in a time of unprecedented change. Science and technology (S&T) are developing and proliferating faster than ever before and have become a new domain of international competition. New adversaries have emerged, alongside traditional threats, who actively undermine our democracy and society, supported by substantial and rapidly modernising militaries. Terrorist groups and non-state actors can access technologies and weapons far more sophisticated than before. The natural environment is challenging us with a global pandemic and we have reached the tipping point where decisive action on climate change is required.

The MOD Science and Technology Strategy 2020 sets out how MOD will secure and maintain scientific and technological advantage in future:

- by prioritising investment to focus on the long term and adopting a challenge-led approach, defence aims to anticipate and shape new technologies and applications of technology, and to build the expertise, policies, and military concepts needed to take advantage of them as soon as they are ready
- MOD will balance this challenge-led approach with a technology push to pursue promising technology or scientific disciplines which offer significant potential to allow them to be integrated into military capability as they mature. MOD will look to collaborate widely but effectively, sharing the effort and sharing knowledge where it is in the UK's interest to do so
- extracting greatest value and impact from defence research also means effectively curating and using the data generated: sharing it appropriately, developing understanding from it, and exploiting it to

inform decisions faster than adversaries and competitors.

[Professor Dame Angela McLean](#), the Defence Chief Scientific Adviser, said:

In an uncertain and rapidly-changing world, we can't afford to be always on the back foot, fighting the latest challenge. This strategy sets out how I intend defence will get ahead of the game and start actively shaping the future.

Read the full [MOD Science and Technology Strategy 2020](#).

Published 19 October 2020

[New strategy places focus on cutting edge science and technology](#)

The strategy was launched with Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Dame Angela McLean, against a backdrop of futuristic autonomous military kit: from UAVs that can fit in the palm of a hand to crewless all-terrain surveillance vehicles commanded remotely from a Challenger II tank and the new AJAX vehicle demonstrating 'human machine teaming' with an unmanned all terrain buggy.

Building on the UK's rich heritage in science and technology, this new strategy will focus on finding and funding the breakthroughs that will shape the future, and ensure the armed forces are equipped to meet tomorrow's threats.

It will also have a renewed focus on data, including capture and curation, which will underpin research to identify threat trends and deliver generation-after-next military hardware.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

We are in a very real race with our adversaries for technological advantage. What we do today will lay the groundwork for decades to come. Proliferation of new technologies demands our science and technology is threat driven and better aligned to our needs in the future.

The pair visited Salisbury Plain ahead of the Army Warfighting Experiment (AWE), which this week will showcase some of the latest British-built

military technologies.

Professor Dame Angela McLean said:

We need a clear focus on what we want science and technology to achieve. I will champion a challenge-led approach, based on trends across science, technology and the military, to set out what we need to be able to do in the future and how we can build towards it through our S&T activity.

Minister for Science Research and Innovation Amanda Solloway said:

Placing science and research at the heart of the UK's defence activity will unleash a new wave of innovation for our brilliant armed forces, equipping them to meet our greatest challenges. By backing our best and brightest scientific minds in every corner of the UK, we will ensure we bolster the security of our nation now and for decades to come.

The Army Warfighting Experiment series allows the British Army to push the boundaries of technology and military technology, testing a range of prototype systems by putting them in the hands of the user while giving invaluable feedback to suppliers. This is all done to ensure that British troops maintain a continuous advantage over adversaries on the battlefield of today and tomorrow.

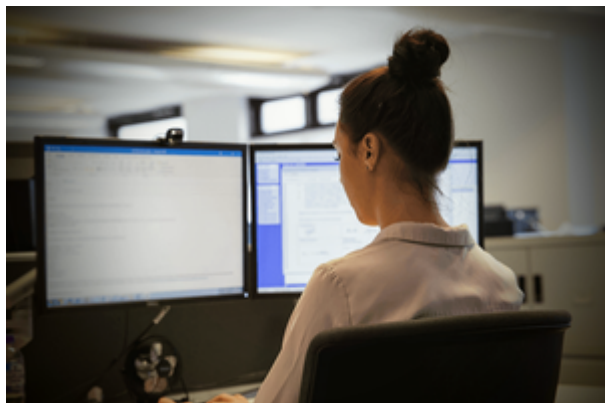
This complements the ongoing Integrated Review of foreign, defence, development and security policy. The Strategy & Technology will also be central to the government's ambition for the UK to cement its status as a world leading science superpower, set out in its ambitious Research & Development Roadmap in July this year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-research-and-development-roadmap/uk-research-and-development-roadmap>

[Cancellations to be resumed](#)

News story

HM Land Registry will resume the cancelling of applications with outstanding requests for information (requisitions) from 16 November 2020.



Reminder letters will be sent to customers giving 4 weeks' notice of the cancellation, along with information on how to request an extension if conveyancers are still unable to reply.

At the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic the cancellation of applications with outstanding requisitions was paused. This was done to give all of our customers additional time to gather the information they needed during these unusual times. However, as there are now an increasing number of applications that cannot be processed and are delayed, (we currently have approximately 100,000 applications in this category), we need to reintroduce the practice.

We are now back at the usual response rate for requisitions. However, we request that you do not wait until you receive a reminder letter to respond to any outstanding requisitions. If you need to see which applications have outstanding requisitions, [please log into the HM Land Registry portal](#) and access the new [View My Applications service](#) where you will find all documents relating to all applications made through the portal.

Not all reminder letters will be sent out at the same time. We will start with the oldest cases and work toward the most recent. Please do not wait to receive your reminder to respond.

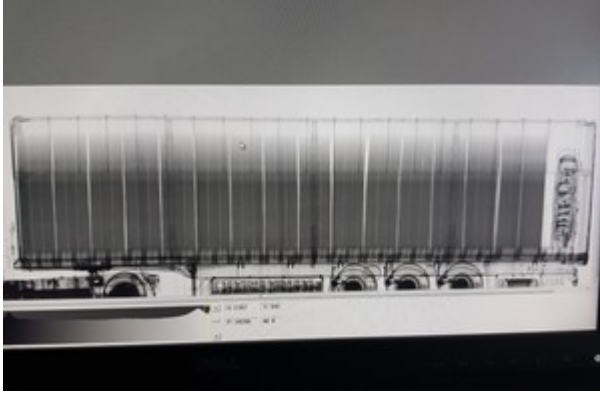
We will not be reinstating new cancellation dates in new requisitions, they will continue to be issued without a cancellation date. This will be reinstated in the future.

Published 19 October 2020

[Border Force seize 10 million black market cigarettes](#)

News story

Seizure prevented the Treasury losing almost £3 million in unpaid duty.



Paperwork for the vehicle showed it should have contained dozens of washing machines

Around 10 million black market cigarettes worth almost £3 million in unpaid duty have been seized by Border Force at Harwich.

Scanners detected anomalies with a Polish-registered lorry which arrived in the Port of Harwich, Essex, on a ferry from the Hook of Holland on Thursday 8 October. Paperwork for the vehicle showed it should have contained dozens of washing machines but only 4 appliances were onboard. Border Force officers inspected the vehicle's trailer to discover huge pallets of shrink-wrapped Lambert and Butler silver cigarettes.

It is the second largest seizure of cigarettes by Border Force at Harwich this year.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Every day Border Force teams are protecting the UK from violent gangs hell-bent on smuggling in weapons, drugs and illicit cash.

Border Force's hard work has stopped criminals from making huge profits from black market cigarettes and cheating the taxpayer out of millions of pounds.

The Polish driver was arrested on suspicion of evasion of excise duty but was subsequently released. The cab and trailer he was driving was seized.

Had the smuggling attempt not been detected, it would have cost the Treasury almost £3 million in unpaid duty and VAT.

Border Force had further success in stopping illicit cigarettes entering the UK at the Port of Dover earlier this month. On Saturday 3 October, officers discovered almost 1 million cigarettes on a Slovenian-registered lorry which had arrived at Dover's Eastern Docks. Four pallets of cigarettes were found worth about £430,000 in unpaid duty and VAT.

Border Force officers use hi-tech search equipment to combat immigration crime and detect banned and restricted goods that smugglers attempt to bring into the UK.

In 2019, Border Force protected the Treasury from losing more than £210 million in unpaid duty from black market cigarettes.

Published 19 October 2020