

Prime Minister's article in the Telegraph: 12 September 2020

It is now more than seven months since this country left the EU on Jan 31, and since then we have been working hard to build what I am sure will be a great new future relationship. We want a thoroughgoing free-trade deal. We want a deal like the one between the EU and Canada; and since we currently conform with every jot and tittle of EU regulation, and since we have been loyal and paid-up members for more than four decades, it strikes me that if the EU is willing to offer these terms to Canada, then it makes sense to offer the same to us.

Our partners know that whatever happens, the UK is their friend, their biggest single export market, and committed forever to the peace and security of the European continent. They know that there are ways in which we want to continue and even deepen our relations – not just in trade. As I have never tired of saying, we have left the EU, but we have not left Europe. But they also know – or at least they know now – that leaving the EU means that the UK is serious about its newfound sovereignty. In forging our new relationships, we can't have our lives or our economy regulated by the European Court; we must have the right to devise our own laws and regulations. And we must have sole control of our spectacular marine wealth – our fisheries.

Those are some of our conditions, and in the last few months I believe we have made considerable progress. If both sides want it, there is a great free trade deal there to be done. So I have become anxious in the last few weeks to discover that there is an obstacle. Our negotiators believe that there may be a serious misunderstanding about the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement that we reached last October. You may remember those days. They were torrid. We were negotiating with one hand tied behind our back, since parliament had voted to deprive the UK side of the right to walk away. We had a deadline of October 31 – which parliament decided to flout. MPs were in a state of constant turmoil and recrimination. And yet, provided it was applied in good faith, the Withdrawal agreement we reached was extremely good.

We excised the baleful presence of the Northern Ireland “backstop” – which effectively kept this country locked in the EU's legal orbit, forced to accept EU laws, unable to do free trade deals. We made sure that Northern Ireland was explicitly recognised as part of the customs territory of the United Kingdom, and able to take part fully in new free trade agreements (such as the one Liz Truss has just done with Japan). And we also took steps to protect free movement at the all-important border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. We agreed that in some limited ways Northern Ireland would continue to conform with EU law for four years. We agreed that this limited alignment would end, unless the Northern Irish assembly voted to continue it. We agreed to do some light-touch checks on goods arriving in Northern Ireland, in case they should go on to Ireland, in order to avoid checks at the North-South border. And on the basis of that excellent deal we left the EU – and so it is deeply regrettable that what seemed so simple and clear to

us is seen very differently by our EU friends.

We decided in the Withdrawal Agreement to create a Joint Committee, in which we would thrash out the details of these new arrangements. It is here that things risk coming unstuck. We are now hearing that unless we agree to the EU's terms, the EU will use an extreme interpretation of the Northern Ireland protocol to impose a full-scale trade border down the Irish sea. We are being told that the EU will not only impose tariffs on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, but that they might actually stop the transport of food products from GB to NI.

I have to say that we never seriously believed that the EU would be willing to use a Treaty, negotiated in good faith, to blockade one part of the UK, to cut it off; or that they would actually threaten to destroy the economic and territorial integrity of the UK. This was for the very good reason that any such barrier, any such tariffs or division would be completely contrary to the letter and the spirit of the Good Friday agreement. By actively undermining the Union of our country, such an interpretation would seriously endanger peace and stability in Northern Ireland. This interpretation cannot have been the real intention of those who framed the protocol (it certainly wasn't ours) – and it is therefore vital that we close that option down.

We want an agreement in the Joint Committee, on how we can implement the protocol. We have consistently shown that we are willing to help our friends – to the extent that is possible and reasonable – to protect the integrity of their Single Market, and to keep a fluid North-South border. But we cannot leave the theoretical power to carve up our country – to divide it – in the hands of an international organisation. We have to protect the UK from that disaster, and that is why we have devised a legal safety net – in the UK internal market Bill – to clarify the position, and to sort out the inconsistencies. This Bill protects jobs and growth across the UK, by preventing barriers to trade between the nations and regions. It means that anything approved for sale in Scotland or Wales must be good for sale in England or Northern Ireland, and vice versa.

The Bill gives freedoms and certainties for businesses and citizens that were previously set out in EU law. That is why, as we now come out of the EU, this Bill is absolutely vital. It is now also clear that we need this Bill to protect the free flow of goods and services between NI and the rest of the UK, and to make sense of that commitment in the EU withdrawal agreement – that NI is part of the UK customs territory. It is therefore crucial for peace, and for the Union itself. We must get this Bill through. So I say to my fellow parliamentarians that we cannot go back to the dark days of last year – the squabbling that so undermined our negotiators. If we fail to pass this Bill, or if we weaken its protections, then we will in fact reduce the chances of getting that Canada-style deal. As it happens, I believe that this country will prosper mightily in either event. We could do very well indeed if we left on Australian terms.

But there is no doubt that in the short term at least the Canada deal would be better and smoother – and that is what we are pitching for. So let's end any potential for misunderstanding. Let's remove this danger to the very

fabric of the United Kingdom. Let's make the EU take their threats off the table. And let's get this Bill through, back up our negotiators, and protect our country.

[Afghanistan: UK statement on historic talks](#)

News story

Foreign Secretary urges parties to 'seize opportunity' in historic Afghan peace talks.



- Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab says talks starting today could lead to "real, positive change"
- He urges Afghan leaders and the Taliban to work towards an inclusive and sustainable peace
- UK military, diplomatic and development support has improved countless lives in Afghanistan

The Foreign Secretary welcomed the start of Afghan peace talks in Doha today (Saturday 12 September) and called for both sides to seize the opportunity to end decades of conflict in Afghanistan.

The UK's military and diplomatic efforts have been critical in supporting Afghanistan over the past 19 years, as it strives to become more stable and prosperous.

In addition, the UK's world-leading aid expertise has helped millions of children go to school and provided life-saving food to those in need.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Today is a moment that I hope leads to real, positive change in Afghanistan. All sides need to seize this opportunity to work

towards an inclusive and sustainable peace.

A comprehensive ceasefire should be agreed quickly for the sake of the Afghan people who have suffered for too long.

The UK, as the third largest troop contributor to the NATO mission, plays a vital role in Afghanistan, most recently supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) with training, mentoring and financial assistance.

Over the last three years the UK has pledged up to £750 million of humanitarian and development support, which has:

- Helped more than 6.4 million children attend school, including over 300,000 girls who can now go to primary school through the Girls' Education Challenge Fund. The second phase of this programme, which launched last year, is supporting more than 70,000 marginalised girls access primary and secondary education and skills training.
- Provided life-saving assistance to hundreds of thousands of people during one of the worst droughts the country ever faced in 2018.
- Given over six million people access to electricity over the last 15 years.

Earlier this month the Foreign Secretary announced a new aid package to tackle the combined threat of coronavirus and famine in developing countries and protect the poorest people. Part of this funding will help vulnerable Afghans – who have faced shortages because of conflict, drought and the economic impacts of coronavirus – have enough money to be able to buy food for their families.

Notes to editors:

1. Today's talks follow earlier announcements in February by the US and Taliban, and the US and the Government of Afghanistan respectively. The UK response to those announcements can be found [here](#).
2. Britain's contribution to the international mission in Afghanistan began in 2001 to prevent terrorist groups using Afghanistan as a safe-haven to launch terrorist attacks.
3. The UK combat mission ended in 2014, but since then the UK has been working, in partnership with NATO allies, to support Afghanistan's

security, development and governance. This effort has been crucial to tackling threats to the UK, including from serious organised crime, including drugs, and international terrorism.

Published 12 September 2020

[Big broadband boost for rural English shires and counties](#)

- More than £22 million invested in government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme for rural areas
- 250,000 English homes and businesses eligible for boosted funding from 17 English councils

More than £22 million of additional funding is being invested into the UK Government's broadband voucher scheme, which subsidises the costs of building gigabit-capable broadband networks to hard-to-reach areas.

Gigabit-capable broadband enables internet download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (mbps) – enough to download a HD movie in less than 30 seconds and lay the foundations for 8K-quality video streaming and virtual reality online gaming.

This new frontier in digital connectivity has the potential to revolutionise rural communities and make them more attractive places to live. It will give people who depend on reliable connections to work from home and keep in touch with family due to coronavirus, the freedom to live and work more flexibly and will help develop thriving digital economies.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman is now urging businesses and communities to apply for the vouchers to future-proof their internet connections and be ready to reap the economic and social benefits brought by new advances in technology.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

This government is determined to connect every home and business to the fastest broadband speeds available from the Highlands to the Jurassic Coast.

But we can only do this with collaboration at a local and national

level so I'm delighted English councils have committed to pump more money into our voucher scheme to help rural communities get gigabit speed broadband.

"A quarter of all properties across the UK can now access these fast and reliable speeds, and we have earmarked a further £5 billion so rural towns and villages across the four nations can get the speeds they need to seize all the benefits of new technology."

The UK Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme targets areas where the cost of building new gigabit broadband infrastructure, which often requires digging trenches to lay full fibre cables to people's doorsteps, is likely to be too high for commercial operators to cover alone.

Since May 2019, vouchers worth up to £3,500 for small and medium sized businesses and up to £1,500 for residential premises have been available to cover these costs in rural areas across the UK.

Seventeen local councils in England have also provided £22.2 million worth of funding to top-up the values of the vouchers in their areas. At least 250,000 homes and businesses in the English countryside are expected to be eligible for this funding.

These include the Borderlands, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, County Durham, Derbyshire, Dorset, East Riding of Yorkshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Sussex and Worcestershire.

Kent County Council also agreed to top-up the scheme for a second time, after providing additional funding back in September 2019.

Rural communities in Wales saw the value of their vouchers double in June, after the UK and Welsh governments announced they were working together to boost the scheme. The UK Government is also in discussions with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and local councils about the potential and approach for gigabit schemes there.

Almost 500,000 premises across the UK have been given access to gigabit-capable broadband since summer 2018 through a £1 billion UK Government funding commitment until the end of 2021.

Combined with industry investment it means 8 million premises can now access gigabit capable broadband compared to around 1.4 million premises two years ago.

Nearly 45,000 gigabit broadband vouchers, worth more than £90 million, have already been issued and there is more than £70 million worth of vouchers on offer immediately to take companies and residents in rural towns and villages out of the digital slow lane.

On top of this, the government has promised £5 billion to ensure hard-to-reach areas get access to gigabit connections over the next few years.

Details on how this will be spent will be announced this autumn.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is a UK-wide, supplier-led scheme offering vouchers used as part of a group project, to pay towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to rural premises, i.e. homes and businesses, providing speeds of over 1,000 Mbps or 1 Gbps. Beneficiaries do not have to take those speeds and pay only for what they want to use, knowing they can increase them over time. Anyone who is interested uses a postcode checker to find registered suppliers in their area. Their chosen supplier will guide them through the application. For more information and to check eligibility visit: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>

Bahrain and Israel: UK responds to announcement of normalisation

News story

The Foreign Secretary has issued a statement on the announcement of the normalisation of relations between Bahrain and Israel.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

I warmly welcome this important agreement normalising relations between Bahrain and Israel. Full diplomatic relations between two of the UK's friends is excellent news.

I was pleased to discuss with Bahraini Foreign Minister Al Zayani

during his visit to London earlier this week how normalisation would contribute towards peace in the region.

Published 11 September 2020

[Financing the 2030 Agenda through Covid-19 and beyond](#)

I'm grateful for the significant input we have received to address the issue of recovering better from the Covid-19 pandemic. Particular thanks go to the Deputy Secretary General, Canada and Jamaica for leading this process, and to our co-leads Rwanda, Fiji and the EU for your excellent collaboration.

The pandemic has painfully exposed our vulnerabilities. Whilst we remain committed to tackling its immediate impacts, we must also seize this opportunity to create greener, healthier, more inclusive and resilient economies and societies, and to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement.

The UK has been proud to co-lead the Recovering Better for Sustainability discussion group. From governments to the private sector to civil society, we are all responsible and must work together in the spirit of global solidarity, to drive the changes we want to see.

From the hundreds of policy ideas suggested to us, we have prioritised truly transformational actions. I would like to use this opportunity to identify a few of our key priorities.

We need a recovery that enables climate-resilient growth, protects our biodiversity and promotes sustainable ways of living. It is therefore critical that member states deliver updated and enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions, integrate these within their recovery plans, and commit to aligning their spending with the objectives of the Paris agreement. The UK is committed to taking forward all these actions.

It is more important now than ever before that we also prioritise building strong and resilient health systems, underpinned by universal health coverage, that deliver better health for everyone and are resilient to threats. The UK is supporting countries to do this by addressing both the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic, having already committed £774m to tackling COVID-19.

We have championed an inclusive recovery, stressing support for the most vulnerable to build fairer societies and ensure no one is left behind. Girls'

education is a vital component of this work with the UK already working to ensure girls and vulnerable children continue to learn whilst schools are closed and are supported to safely get back to school and catch-up on lost learning.

These are some of our key priorities, but I urge you to review the recommendations in full as we owe it to future generations to build back better and accelerate progress in this Decade of Action.

The UK will continue to drive forward this ambition through our presidencies of COP26 and the G7 next year. We are relying on your support to commit to and deliver the collective action needed for a global recovery.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you to put these ambitions in to practice.