

PM statement on Brexit negotiations: 15 November 2018

Prime Minister Theresa May updates the House of Commons on the Brexit negotiations.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on our negotiations to leave the European Union.

First, I want to pay tribute to my Rt Hon Friends the Members for Esher and Walton and Tatton.

Delivering Brexit involves difficult choices for all of us.

We do not agree on all of those choices but I respect their views and thank them sincerely for all that they have done.

Mr Speaker, yesterday we agreed the provisional terms of our exit from the European Union, set out in the Draft Withdrawal Agreement.

We also agreed the broad terms of our future relationship, in an Outline Political Declaration.

President Juncker has now written to the President of the European Council to recommend that “decisive progress has been made in the negotiations.”

And a special European Council will be called for Sunday 25th November.

This puts us close to a Brexit deal.

Mr Speaker, what we agreed yesterday was not the final deal.

It is a draft treaty that means we will leave the EU in a smooth and orderly way on 29 March 2019 and which sets the framework for a future relationship that delivers in our national interest.

It takes back control of our borders, laws and money.

It protects jobs, security and the integrity of the United Kingdom.

And it delivers in ways that many said could simply not be done.

We were told that we had a binary choice between the model of Norway or the model of Canada. That we could not have a bespoke deal.

But the Outline Political Declaration sets out an arrangement that is better for our country than both of these - a more ambitious free trade agreement than the EU has with any other country.

And we were told we would be treated like any other third country on security co-operation.

But the Outline Political Declaration sets out a breadth and depth of co-operation beyond anything the EU has agreed with any other country.

So let me take the House through the details.

First, on the Withdrawal Agreement, the full legal text has now been agreed in principle.

It sets out the terms on which the UK will leave the EU in 134 days' time on 29th March 2019.

We have secured the rights of the more than three million EU citizens living in the UK, and around one million UK nationals living in the EU.

We have agreed a time-limited implementation period that ensures businesses only have to plan for one set of changes.

We have agreed Protocols to ensure Gibraltar and the Sovereign Base Areas are covered by the Withdrawal Agreement.

And we have agreed a fair financial settlement - far lower than the figures many mentioned at the start of this process.

Mr Speaker, since the start of this process I have been committed to ensuring that our exit from the EU deals with the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

I believe this issue can best be solved through our future relationship with the EU. But the withdrawal agreement sets out an insurance policy should that new relationship not be ready in time at the end of the implementation period.

I do not pretend that this has been a comfortable process – or that either we or the EU are entirely happy with all of the arrangements that have been included within it.

Of course this is the case – this is an arrangement that we have both said we never want to have to use.

But while some people might pretend otherwise, there is no deal which delivers the Brexit the British people voted for which does not involve this insurance policy.

Not Canada +++. Not Norway for Now. Not our own White Paper.

The EU will not negotiate any future partnership without it.

As the House knows, the original proposal from the EU was not acceptable as it would have meant creating a customs border down the Irish Sea and breaking up the integrity of our United Kingdom.

So last month, I set out for the House the four steps we needed to take.

This is what we have now done and it has seen the EU make a number of concessions towards our position.

First, the EU proposal for a Northern-Ireland only customs solution has been dropped and replaced by a new UK-wide temporary customs arrangement that protects the integrity of our precious Union.

Second, we have created an option for a single time-limited extension of the Implementation Period as an alternative to bringing in the backstop.

As I have said many times, I do not want to extend the Implementation Period and I do not believe we will need to do so. This is about an insurance policy.

But if it happens that at the end of 2020 our future relationship is not quite ready - the UK will be able to make a choice between the UK-wide temporary customs arrangement or a short extension of the Implementation Period.

Third, the Withdrawal Agreement commits both parties to use best endeavours to ensure this insurance policy is never used.

And in the unlikely event that it is needed, if we choose the backstop, the Withdrawal Agreement is explicit that it is temporary and that the Article 50 legal base cannot provide for a permanent relationship. And there is also a mechanism by which the backstop can be terminated.

Finally, we have ensured full continued access for Northern Ireland's businesses to the whole of the UK internal market.

Mr Speaker, the Brexit talks are about acting in the national interest - and that means making what I believe to be the right choices, not the easy ones.

I know there are some who have said I should simply rip-up the UK's commitment to a backstop.

But this would have been an entirely irresponsible course of action.

It would have meant reneging on a promise made to the people of Northern Ireland during the Referendum campaign and afterwards that under no circumstances would Brexit lead to a return to the borders of the past.

And it would have made it impossible to deliver a Withdrawal Agreement.

As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I have a responsibility to people in every part of our country and I intend to honour that promise.

Mr Speaker, by resolving this issue, we are now able to move on to finalising the details of an ambitious future partnership.

The Outline Political Declaration we have agreed sets out the basis for these negotiations and we will negotiate intensively ahead of the European Council to turn this into a full future framework.

The Declaration will end free movement once and for all.

Instead we will have our own new, skills-based, immigration system - based not on the country people come from, but on what they can contribute to the UK.

The Declaration agrees the creation of a free trade area for goods, with zero tariffs, no fees, charges or quantitative restrictions across all goods sectors.

No other major advanced economy has such an arrangement with the EU. And at the same time, we will also be free to strike new trade deals with other partners around the world.

We have also reached common ground on a close relationship on services and investment, including financial services which go well beyond WTO commitments.

The Declaration ensures we will be leaving the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy.

So we will decide how best to sustain and support our farms and our environment, and the UK will become an independent coastal state once again.

We have also reached agreement on key elements of our future security partnership to keep our people safe.

This includes swift and effective extradition arrangements as well as arrangements for effective data exchange on Passenger Name Records, DNA, fingerprints and vehicle registration data.

And we have agreed a close and flexible partnership on foreign, security and defence policy.

Mr Speaker, when I first became Prime Minister in 2016 there was no ready-made blueprint for Brexit.

Many people said it could simply not be done.

I have never accepted that. I have been committed day and night to delivering on the result of the referendum and ensuring the UK leaves the EU absolutely and on time.

But I also said at the very start that withdrawing from EU membership after 40 years, and establishing a wholly new relationship that will endure for decades to come, would be complex and require hard work.

I know it's been a frustrating process – it has forced us to confront some very difficult issues.

But a good Brexit. A Brexit which is in the national interest is possible.

We have persevered and have made a decisive breakthrough.

Once a final deal is agreed, I will bring it to Parliament and I will ask MPs to consider the national interest and give it their backing.

Voting against a deal would take us all back to square one.

It would mean more uncertainty, more division, and a failure to deliver on the decision of the British people that we should leave the EU.

If we get behind a deal, we can bring our country back together and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

Mr Speaker, the British people want us to get this done. And to get on with addressing the other issues they care about.

Creating more good jobs in every part of the UK and doing more to help families with the cost of living.

Helping our NHS to provide first class care and our schools to give every child a great start in life.

And focusing every ounce of our energy on building a brighter future for our country.

So Mr Speaker, the choice is clear.

We can choose to leave with no deal.

We can risk no Brexit at all.

Or we can choose to unite and support the best deal that can be negotiated. This deal.

A deal that ends free movement...

...takes back control of our borders, laws and money...

...delivers a free trade area for goods with zero tariffs...

...leaves the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy...

...delivers an independent foreign and defence policy, while retaining the continued security co-operation to keep our people safe...

...maintains shared commitments to high standards...

...protects jobs...

...honours the integrity of our United Kingdom...

...and delivers the Brexit the British people voted for.

I choose to deliver for the British people.

I choose to do what is in our national interest.

And I commend this Statement to the House.