

Prime Minister Boris Johnson statement on Brexit negotiations in the House of Commons

3 October 2019

With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement on the government's proposals for a new agreement with our European friends

that would honour the result of the referendum and deliver Brexit on 31st October - in an orderly way with a deal.

This government's objective has always been to leave with a deal. And these constructive and reasonable proposals show our seriousness of purpose.

They do not deliver everything that we would have wished. They do represent a compromise.

But to remain a prisoner of existing positions is to become a cause of deadlock rather than breakthrough.

And so we have made a genuine attempt to bridge the chasm, to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable. And to go the extra mile as time runs short.

Our starting point is that this House promised to respect the referendum before the vote. More people voted Leave than voted for any political party in our history.

This referendum must be respected.

Both main parties promised at the 2017 election that they would respect the referendum and there would be no second referendum.

This House voted to trigger Article 50 and has voted repeatedly to leave.

Yet it also voted three times against the previous Withdrawal Agreement and for repeated delay.

And so, as I have emphasised time and again, there can be no path to a deal except by reopening the Withdrawal Agreement and replacing the so-called backstop.

While, as I stand here today, we are some way from a resolution, it is to the credit of our European friends that they have accepted the need to address these issues.

And I welcome the constructive calls I have had over the last twenty-four hours

including with President Juncker, Chancellor Merkel, Taoiseach Varadkar

and the statement from President Juncker that the Commission will now examine the legal text objectively.

The essence of our new proposal is a new Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland consisting of five elements.

In the first place all our actions are based on our shared determination to sustain the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the fundamental basis of governance in Northern Ireland

the protection of which is the highest priority of all.

And from this follows the second principle – namely that we shall of course uphold all the longstanding areas of co-operation between the UK and our friends in Ireland

including the rights of all those living in Northern Ireland, North/South co-operation

and the Common Travel Area, which predates both the Good Friday Agreement and the European Union itself.

Third, we propose the potential creation of a regulatory zone on the island of Ireland covering all goods, including agri-food.

For as long as it exists, this zone would eliminate all regulatory checks for trade in goods between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

But fourth, unlike the so-called backstop, such a regulatory zone would be sustained with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, as expressed through the Assembly and Executive.

They will give their consent during the transition period as a condition for these arrangements entering into force.

Thereafter, the Assembly will vote again every four years - and if consent were withheld, these arrangements would then lapse after one year.

Fifth, it has always been a point of principle for this government that at the end of the transition period, the UK should leave the EU Customs Union whole and entire

restoring sovereign control over our trade policy and opening the way for free trade deals with all our friends around the world.

That is a fundamental point for us, Mr Speaker.

So, under the proposals in this new Protocol, Northern Ireland will be fully part of the UK customs territory not the EU Customs Union.

But there will be no need for checks – or any infrastructure – at or near the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Indeed, I have already given a guarantee that the UK government will never conduct checks at the border

and we believe that the EU should do the same, so there is absolute clarity on that point.

Instead under this new Protocol all customs checks between Northern Ireland and Ireland would take place either electronically

or in the small number of cases where physical checks would be necessary, they would happen at traders' premises or other points in the supply chain.

We have put forward a method for achieving this

based on improving and simplifying existing rules, trusting certain traders and strengthening our co-operation with Ireland

in a spirit of friendship and sensitivity to the particular circumstances.

So while these proposals will mean changes from the situation that prevails today in Ireland and Northern Ireland

it is their driving purpose to minimise any disruption.

And in order to support the transition further we propose a New Deal for Northern Ireland

that will boost economic growth and competitiveness

and set in train new infrastructure, particularly with a cross-border focus.

Mr Speaker, the previous Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration would have permanently anchored the United Kingdom within the orbit of EU regulation and customs arrangements.

And an indefinite so-called backstop provided a bridge to that vision of the future.

This Government has a different vision – basing our future relationship with our European neighbours on a Free Trade Agreement

and allowing the UK to take back control of our trade policy and our regulations.

And we propose to amend the Political Declaration to reflect this ambition.

Our proposals should now provide the basis for rapid negotiations towards a solution in the short time that remains.

I do not for one moment resile from the fact that we have shown great flexibility in the interests of reaching an accommodation with our European friends

and achieving the resolution for which we all yearn.

If our European neighbours choose not to show a corresponding willingness to reach a deal

then we shall have to leave on 31st October without an agreement

and we are ready to do so.

But that outcome would be a failure of statecraft for which all parties would be held responsible.

When I think of the conflicts that have wracked Europe in the past

of the immense challenges that we have together surmounted
of the 74 years of peace and prosperity we have together achieved
I believe that surely we can summon the collective will to reach a new agreement.

Mr Speaker, this government has moved
our proposals do represent a compromise
and I hope the House can now come together in the national interest
behind this new deal.

To open a new chapter of friendship with our European neighbours
and move on to our domestic priorities – including education, infrastructure and our NHS.

So Mr Speaker, let us seize this moment
to honour our over-riding promise to the British people
respect Brexit
and get Brexit done
and I commend this Statement to the House.