

UK Government secures deal with the EU

Towards the end of the afternoon on Christmas Eve, both the EU and the UK held press conferences to confirm that a deal had eventually been struck agreeing terms under which we will all live in a post Brexit world.

The EU, represented by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen and by Head of the UK Task Force, Michel Barnier, addressed the press in three languages seamlessly. They expressed how relieved they were at the fact they had struck a deal with the EU, referred to the unity on the EU side throughout the negotiations, and that it would be good to put Brexit behind them. M. Barnier expressed regret that the UK Government did not take the opportunity to continue the Erasmus exchange programme with all the opportunities that has offered to so many.

But the Prime Minister later announced that it will be replaced by a worldwide programme named after Alan Turing, the 20th century code breaker.

The announcements were light on the detail which will no doubt be clarified over the next day or so – and certainly before 31 December when it was feared the UK might leave the EU without a deal.

Here is the text of Boris Johnson's speech:

It is four and a half years since the British people voted to take back control of their money, their borders, their laws, and their waters and to leave the European Union.

And earlier this year we fulfilled that promise and we left on Jan 31 with that oven-ready deal.

Since that time we have been getting on with our agenda.

Enacting the points based immigration system that you voted for and that will come into force on Jan 1.

And doing free trade deals with 58 countries around the world.

And preparing the new relationship with the EU.

And there have been plenty of people who have told us that the challenges of the Covid pandemic have made this work impossible.

And that we should extend the transition period.

And incur yet more delay.

And I rejected that approach precisely because beating Covid is our number one national priority and I wanted to end any extra uncertainty and to give this country the best possible chance of bouncing back strongly next year.

And so I am very pleased that this afternoon that we have completed the biggest trade deal yet, worth £660 billion.

A comprehensive Canada style free trade deal between the UK and the EU, a deal that will protect jobs across this country.

A deal that will allow UK goods and components to be sold without tariffs and without quotas in the EU market.

A deal which will if anything should allow our companies and our exporters to do even more business with our European friends.

And yet which achieves something that the people of this country instinctively knew was doable.

But which they were told was impossible.

We have taken back control of laws and our destiny.

We have taken back control of every jot and tittle of our regulation.

In a way that is complete and unfettered.

From Jan 1 we are outside the customs union, and outside the single market.

British laws will be made solely by the British Parliament.

Interpreted by UK judges sitting in UK courts.

And the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will come to an end.

We will be able to set our own standards, to innovate in the way that we want, to originate new frameworks for the sectors in which this country leads the world, from biosciences to financial services, artificial intelligence and beyond.

We will be able to decide how and where we are going to stimulate new jobs and new hope.

With freeports and new green industrial zones.

We will be able to cherish our landscape and our environment in the way we choose.

Backing our farmers and backing British food and agricultural production.

And for the first time since 1973 we will be an independent coastal state with full control of our waters with the UK's share of fish in our waters rising substantially from roughly half today to closer to 2/3 in five and a half years' time after which there is no theoretical limit beyond those placed by science or conservation on the quantity of our own fish that we can fish in our waters.

And to get ready for that moment those fishing communities we will be helped with a big £100m programme to modernise their fleets and the fish processing industry.

And I want to stress that although of course the arguments with our European friends and partners were sometimes fierce this is, I believe a good deal for the whole of Europe and for our friends and partners as well.

Because it will not be a bad thing for the EU to have a prosperous and dynamic and contented UK on your doorstep.

And it will be a good thing – it will drive jobs and prosperity across the whole continent.

And I don't think it will be a bad thing if we in the UK do things differently, or take a different approach to legislation.

Because in so many ways our basic goals are the same.

And in the context of this giant free trade zone that we're jointly creating the stimulus of regulatory competition will I think benefit us both.

And if one side believes it is somehow being unfairly undercut by the other, then subject to independent third party arbitration and provided the measures are proportionate, we can either of us decide – as sovereign equals – to protect our consumers.

But this treaty explicitly envisages that such action should

only happen infrequently and the concepts of uniformity and harmonisation are banished in favour of mutual respect and mutual recognition and free trade.

And for squaring that circle, for finding the philosopher's stone that's enabled us to do this I want to thank President von der Leyen of the European Commission and our brilliant negotiators led by Lord Frost and Michel Barnier, on the EU side Stephanie Rousseau as well as Oliver Lewis, Tim Barrow, Lindsay Appleby and many others.

Their work will be available for scrutiny, followed by a parliamentary vote I hope on Dec 30.

This agreement, this deal above all means certainty.

It means certainty for the aviation industry and the hauliers who have suffered so much in the Covid pandemic.

It means certainty for the police and the border forces and the security services and all those that we rely on across Europe to keep us safe.

It means certainty for our scientists who will be able to continue to work together on great collective projects.

Because although we want the UK to be a science superpower, we also want to be a collaborative science superpower.

And above all it means certainty for business from financial services to our world-leading manufacturers – our car industry – certainty for those working in high skilled jobs in firms and factories across the whole country.

Because there will be no palisade of tariffs on Jan 1.

And there will be no non-tariff barriers to trade.

And instead there will be a giant free trade zone of which we will at once be a member.

And at the same time be able to do our own free trade deals as one UK, whole and entire, England, NI, Scotland and Wales together.

And I should stress this deal was done by a huge negotiating team from every part of the UK, and it will benefit every part of our United Kingdom, helping to unite and level up across the country.

And so I say again directly to our EU friends and partners, I think this deal means a new stability and a new certainty in what has sometimes been a fractious and difficult relationship.

We will be your friend, your ally, your supporter and indeed – never let it be forgotten – your number one market.

Because although we have left the EU this country will remain culturally, emotionally, historically, strategically and geologically attached to Europe, not least through the four million EU nationals who have requested to settle in the UK over the last four years and who make an enormous contribution to our country and to our lives.

And I say to all of you at home.

At the end of this toughest of years.

That our focus in the weeks ahead is of course on defeating the pandemic.

And on beating coronavirus and rebuilding our economy.

And delivering jobs across the country.

And I am utterly confident that we can and will do it.

By today we have vaccinated almost 800,000 people and we have also today resolved a question that has bedevilled our politics for decades.

And it is up to us all together.

As a newly and truly independent nation.

To realise the immensity of this moment and to make the most of it.

Happy Christmas to you all.

That's the good news from Brussels – now for the sprouts.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said: “The UK’s deal with the EU is great news for Scotland’s businesses. There are huge opportunities ahead – not just with this exceptional access to the EU market, but also in new markets right around the world.

“We have an agreement on fisheries which will ensure that our fishermen, and our coastal communities, will flourish outside of the EU’s unfair Common Fisheries Policy. The UK will once more be a sovereign coastal state.

“The deal protects famous Scottish products such as whisky, Arbroath Smokies and Orkney cheddar.

“People in Scotland will benefit from a wide range of social security and healthcare rights while travelling, working and living in the EU.

“Now, Scottish businesses need to get ready. The UK Government has been preparing intensively, and working with businesses, and that will continue. The Scottish Government also needs to do its bit and take action in devolved areas – we have given the Scottish Government nearly £200 million to prepare for Brexit.

“The United Kingdom will always be a welcoming, outwards-facing nation. Our European neighbours are our friends, and that will not change. EU citizens will continue to be an important part of many of Scotland’s communities. This is a historic moment for us all. There are enormous opportunities

ahead of us, and we all need to make the most of them.”

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: “It beggars belief that in the midst of a pandemic and economic recession Scotland has been forced out of the EU Single Market and Customs Union with all the damage to jobs that will bring.

“A deal is better than no deal. But, just because, at the eleventh hour, the UK Government has decided to abandon the idea of a no-deal outcome, it should not distract from the fact that they have chosen a hard Brexit, stripping away so many of the benefits of EU membership.

“And while we do not yet have full details on the nature of the deal, it appears major promises made by the UK Government on fisheries have been broken and the extent of these broken promises will become apparent to all very soon.

“People in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, but their views have been ignored.

“This is a far harder Brexit than could have been imagined when the EU referendum took place, damaging and disrupting this nation’s economy and society at the worst possible time.

“We are doing everything we can to mitigate against the consequences of the UK Government’s actions – but we cannot avert every negative outcome.

“We know that businesses are already struggling under the burden of COVID-19, and are now faced with the need to prepare for this hard Brexit in little more than a week’s time. We will do all we can to help them and are issuing updated information and advice and urge those most affected, including businesses, to prepare.

“Scotland did not vote for any of this and our position is clearer than ever. Scotland now has the right to choose its own future as an independent country and once more regain the

benefits of EU membership.”

Scottish Conservative Leader, Douglas Ross MP said: “This deal has been secured as a result of the hard work and commitment of the UK and European negotiating teams.

“Both sides recognised the importance of reaching agreement on a range of complex issues and avoiding a damaging no deal outcome. To have done so just in time for Christmas is great news.

“Crucially, this will protect Scottish jobs and our fishing communities will be far better off outwith the hated Common Fisheries Policy.

“It is vital that we now move on from past divisions and focus entirely on working together to fight coronavirus and rebuild Scotland’s economy.”

Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard said: “ Scottish Labour has called for an extension to the Brexit process, in light of the escalation of the Covid crisis so that we avoid the economic shock we will now face.

“While it’s better that a no deal exit has been averted, Boris Johnson’s irresponsible brinksmanship and his gross mismanagement of this process from start to finish has caused huge economic uncertainty.

“Against the backdrop of Covid, the worst crisis the UK has faced since the Second World War, the Tories have left workers and businesses on the cliff edge of a disastrous ‘No Deal’ by leaving it to the 11th hour to secure a deal.

“We must now look at the detail of the deal, and move on with a plan to protect jobs, incomes and our public services in Scotland, as we face a pandemic-driven recession.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie said: “As the Liberal Democrats have been the strongest pro-European party

across the country over the last five years people will understand that we are bereft by the decision to leave our neighbours in Europe.

“Today my heart is filled with great sadness because we are separating from our good neighbours in Europe. Our partnership has made us stronger and it is a massive regret that we are turning our back on it.

“It is a raw deal because it will be the first trade agreement in history that will erect more trade barriers and will put billions of pounds of extra costs on imports and exports which will have a knock on effect on jobs and business.

“We will study the deal carefully but it looks like they have done nothing to address the problems of red tape and the associated costs.”

Scottish Greens co-leader Patrick Harvie said: “Boris Johnson has already caused huge damage by playing games of brinkmanship right up to seven days before the end of the transition period. There will now be some sense of relief that the dangerous prospect of crashing out with no deal has been averted. However, there is now no time for anything but the most cursory scrutiny in either Parliament.

“The country is being given a take-it-or-leave-it deal, but we won't be able to debate the detail, and the one thing we know is that the cost of Brexit remains high. As well as the financial hit, the legacy of the UK Government's reckless approach will live on, in the broken relationships with European partners, in the lowering of worker's rights, standards and protections, and in the hearts of people in Northern Ireland and Scotland, who are badly let down by a Brexit they didn't vote for.

“In the long run, I believe we will look back on this as a period of extraordinarily incompetent government from the UK, but ultimately as only a brief interruption in Scotland's

place in Europe. We will take our future into our own hands, and we will re-join.”

Donna Fordyce, Chief Executive of Seafood Scotland, said: “Having a deal on the table at long last comes as a welcome relief to the Scottish seafood sector, which relies heavily on exports. In particular, tariff-free trade is a huge benefit.

“However, this is a two-sided deal. Over the last few days we’ve seen the utter chaos that disruption at the Border causes. With Brexit will come new, untested, and extremely complex processes that the seafood sector will have to comply with in just a week’s time, at huge cost which they can ill afford just now. This bureaucratic blockade will result in some lorries not making it to Europe in time to ensure their highly perishable cargo is saleable.

“We expect it to be a good few months until everything beds in and in the meantime, seafood businesses will try their best to navigate the changes, but some will not survive.”