



DEBATE PACK

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Effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on negotiations for a future UK/EU relationship

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Opposition Day Debate

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. The negotiations

1.1 Summary

The negotiations on the UK-EU future relationship began in early March. Planned negotiating rounds in mid-March and early April did not take place because of the coronavirus outbreak. Negotiations resumed in late April by video conference. Negotiating rounds so far have not resolved the major differences between the two parties on key issues, including the EU's proposed "level playing field" commitments, fisheries, police and judicial co-operation, and governance. In early June, the UK and EU agreed a new intensified negotiating schedule, with weekly face-to-face meetings taking place in late June and July.

At the end of June, the deadline for extending the transition period set by the Withdrawal Agreement passed. This means the transition period will end on 31 December and UK-EU trade arrangements will then revert to WTO rules if no new partnership agreement has been ratified and implemented. The EU has said an agreement would need to be reached by the end of October in order for it to be ratified by the end of the year.

The UK Government has said that the EU's proposals on level playing field, fisheries and governance are unprecedented when compared to the EU's agreements with other countries, and do not respect the fact that the UK has left the EU as an independent state. The EU has said that it will not accept "cherry picking" from the EU's other agreements and that the UK is asking for a status in some areas that is equivalent to that of an EU Member State. The EU says that it is willing to look for compromises but that these need to be on the basis of the Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship (agreed by the UK and EU in October 2019), rather than its agreements with other countries.

1.2 The negotiating timetable

Negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and EU began on 2 March.

The revised UK [Withdrawal Agreement](#) (WA) and accompanying [Political Declaration](#) on the EU-UK future relationship in October 2019 together established an outline timetable for negotiations.

The PD sets out the shared intent of the UK and EU to get future relationship agreements in place by the end of 2020. This would be with the aim of implementing the new relationship as soon as the transition period ends. Without an agreement in place, the UK-EU

trading relationship will revert to WTO rules. Arrangements governing UK-EU co-operation in several policy areas will cease.

The PD also sets out dates by which other objectives should be achieved. It committed the UK and EU to using their best endeavours to conclude and ratify a fisheries agreement by 1 July 2020. It also said that they should conduct equivalence assessments for financial services by the end of June 2020, and that they should reach data adequacy decisions by the end of 2020.

The PD provided for a high level UK-EU meeting to take place in June 2020 to assess progress in the negotiations (this took place on 15 June 2020).

When presenting the draft EU negotiating directives on 3 February, Michel Barnier set out a [timeline for negotiations](#) which envisaged negotiations being concluded by the European Council (EU heads of state or government) meeting on 15-16 October 2020. This would allow time for ratification of any agreement so that it would be ready for implementation on 1 January 2021. Negotiation of any outstanding issues could then continue in 2021.

Revised timetable

At the end of February, the UK and EU published agreed [terms of reference](#) for the negotiations. This provided for five rounds of negotiations to have taken place by the middle of May 2020, with further rounds to be mutually agreed. The envisaged high level UK-EU meeting in June would “take stock of progress, with the aim of agreeing actions to move forward in negotiations”.

The scheduled second and third rounds of negotiations did not take place because of the coronavirus lockdown across Europe. On 15 April, the two lead negotiators, David Frost (UK) and Michel Barnier (EU) [announced a new schedule of negotiations](#). This would involve three new rounds to take place by videoconference in the weeks commencing 20 April, 11 May and 1 June.

The proposed timeline for concluding an agreement by the end of 2020 was seen as ambitious by [several commentators](#). The loss of negotiating rounds, the switch to negotiating by videoconference and the diversion of resources and political attention towards addressing the coronavirus outbreak increased concerns about the viability of the timeline. Even if an agreement is agreed and ratified by the end of the year, concerns have been raised about the viability of expecting businesses to adapt to the new arrangements in time, particularly in the wake of the disruption caused by the coronavirus.¹

¹ The challenges of agreeing, ratifying and implementing an agreement in time are discussed in the Institute for Government publication, [Implementing Brexit - Securing more time](#), 30 May 2020, p6-12.

1.3 The transition period and calls for extension

The WA provides for a [transition period](#), during which EU law (with a few exceptions) continues to apply to the UK. This ends on 31 December 2020, but the WA allowed for a one-off extension to the transition period of up to two years. This would need to be agreed by both the UK and EU in the Joint Committee that oversees the WA. Article 132 of the WA provided a deadline of 1 July 2020 by which any such decision would have to be taken in the Joint Committee.² This is co-chaired by Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove for the UK and European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič for the EU.

The coronavirus outbreak and the disruption to the future relationship negotiating timetable led to increased calls for an extension to the transition period.

The [Scottish](#) and [Welsh](#) Governments, Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats and MPs from other parties called on the UK Government to seek a transition. Several [other organisations](#), [former UK diplomats](#) and other commentators³ and the [main centre-right EPP group](#) in the European Parliament also called for an extension.

The Scottish Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell said on 20 April that it was “reckless” for the UK Government to continue negotiations at the height of the coronavirus crisis and called on it to seek the maximum two-year extension of the transition period. He said:

The Scottish economy cannot afford the double hit of COVID-19 and the growing likelihood of a ‘no deal’, or at best a hard Brexit deal, in less than nine months’ time.⁴

On 15 May, the SNP Westminster leader Ian Blackford, acting leader of the Liberal Democrats Sir Ed Davey and MPs from the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and two Northern Ireland parties (the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Alliance Party) [wrote](#) to Michel Barnier in support of extension of the transition period.

The Labour party leader, Keir Starmer, said on 5 April that keeping to the deadline of ending the transition on 31 December would be “[unlikely](#)” and the Government should seek to extend if necessary. When asked on 11 May whether he would support an extension, Mr Starmer said that he didn’t think the current timeline was practical, but that “we’re going to hold them to that”.

² See Commons Library briefing paper 8929, [UK-EU future relationship negotiating timetable: extending the transition](#), 2 June 2020

³ See for example: Sam Lowe, [Why the UK should extend the transition period](#), Centre for European Reform, 20 April 2020; and Anand Menon and Angus Armstrong, [Let’s get serious: we need to extend the transition period with the EU](#), *The Guardian*, 19 April 2020. Others have argued against the transition. For example, see Shanker Singham [Brexit – and why the transition period must not be extended beyond December this year](#), 14 April 2020.

⁴ Scottish Government, [Extend Brexit transition during COVID 19 crisis](#), 20 April 2020

He added:

I've not called for a pause because the government says it's going to get it done by the end of the year. So let's see how they get on.⁵

The Government had repeatedly stated that it would not agree to an extension of the transition period. This was a [Conservative manifesto commitment](#) at the December 2019 general election. The Government subsequently legislated to prohibit itself from agreeing an extension to the transition. The [EU \(Withdrawal Agreement\) Act](#) in January 2020, inserted [section 15A of the EU \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018](#) to introduce this prohibition. On 18 March Boris Johnson said that he had [no intention of changing this legislation](#).

The UK Government has continued to reject the possibility of a transition extension. On 16 April, David Frost [tweeted](#):

Transition ends on 31 December this year. We will not ask to extend it. If the EU asks we will say no.

He [added](#):

Extending would simply prolong negotiations, create even more uncertainty, leave us liable to pay more to the EU in future, and keep us bound by evolving EU laws at a time when we need to control our own affairs. In short, it is not in the UK's interest to extend.

In his evidence to the to the Commons Future Relationship Committee on 27 April, Mr Gove said that one of the reasons the UK wanted to be outside of the legal architecture of the EU was "so that we can have the maximum flexibility when it comes to state aid, to Government procurement and to other steps that we may need to strengthen our economy". He also said that

If we were to extend, it would involve us paying more money into the European Union at a time when that money could be spent on our National Health Service. It would involve us accepting not just the existing EU acquis but potentially new EU laws over which we would have no say, which could potentially constrain this country. Those EU laws would be shaped in the interests of the EU 27, rather than the UK as well.

Moreover, he said that an extension of the transition would remove the incentive to come to an agreement.

Mr Gove was asked about the Government's capacity to complete the negotiations when Government officials had been redeployed to deal with the coronavirus crisis. He said that 47 UK officials had been redeployed from the EU future relationship negotiations and end of transition preparations to the Government's response to the coronavirus. But he said that the work of the UK negotiating team had been supplemented by officials from across Whitehall who were subject

⁵ *The Independent*, [Keir Starmer refuses to back Brexit transition extension](#), 11 May 2020

specialists in their areas, and that negotiators had “all the help they need” to ensure their work could continue.⁶

In his evidence to the House of Lords EU Committee on 5 May, Mr Gove said that while the coronavirus outbreak was the Government’s principal focus “the Government have now developed a rhythm of decision-making that means that the bandwidth of Ministers allows them to carry on with other business-as-usual activity”. He also said that over a hundred civil servants from various different government departments had supported David Frost in the second round of negotiations in April.⁷

On 27 April, the *Huffington Post* cited a Government source who said:

Ultimately either there is an agreement to be made or there’s not . . . There’s a view that an extra six months or a year doesn’t fundamentally change that.⁸

Deadline for extending the transition period passes

The deadline in the Withdrawal Agreement for extending the transition has now passed. The last Joint Committee meeting before the 1 July deadline took place on 9 June. Following the meeting on 12 June, Mr Gove tweeted:

I formally confirmed the UK will not extend the transition period & the moment for extension has now passed. On 1 January 2021 we will take back control and regain our political & economic independence.

In a statement following the meeting, Mr Šefčovič said that he had taken note of the UK position and had stated that the EU remained open to such an extension (this remained a possibility as another meeting of the Joint Committee could have been called before the end of June and a decision could also have been taken by written procedure⁹).

⁶ Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union, [Oral evidence: Progress of the negotiations on the UK’s Future Relationship with the EU](#), HC 203, 27 April 2020..

⁷ House of Lords Select Committee on the EU, [Uncorrected oral evidence](#), 5 May 2020.

⁸ *Huffington Post*, [Despite Coronavirus, No.10 Won't Extend The Brexit Transition. Here's Why](#), 27 April 2020.

⁹ This would also have required repeal of [Section 15A of the EU \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018](#) prohibiting UK Ministers from agreeing to an extension of the transition period in the JC. If the decision was taken by written procedure, it would have also required repeal of [Section 15C of the EU \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018](#) prohibiting UK Ministers from agreeing to use the written procedure in the Joint Committee. Both of these provisions had been added by the [European Union \(Withdrawal Agreement\) Act 2020](#). See Commons Library Insight, [Coronavirus: Is it possible to extend the Brexit transition period?](#), 20 April 2020. A joint decision to extend the transition would also have needed to be preceded by negotiation between the UK and EU on the terms of the transition (including duration and the UK financial contribution) as discussed in Commons Library briefing paper 8929, [UK-EU future relationship negotiating timetable: extending the transition](#).

He also restated the EU's position that "negotiations on our future relationship are also contingent on the faithful implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement".¹⁰

The Council of the EU also adopted conclusions on EU-UK relations (by written procedure) on 25 June which took note of the UK decision not to request "and its intention to refuse an extension of the transition period". This, it said, meant that the transition period will end on 31 December 2020.¹¹

In the command paper setting out its negotiating objectives at the end of February, the Government said that it hoped that by the point of the June high-level UK-EU meeting envisaged by the October 2019 [Political Declaration \(PD\)](#) that "the broad outline of an agreement would be clear and be capable of being rapidly finalised by September". It indicated that if this was not the case by June then it would "decide whether the UK's attention should move away from negotiations and focus solely on continuing domestic preparations to exit the transition period in an orderly fashion". It said the Government would also take into account "in particular whether good progress has been possible on the least controversial areas of the negotiations, and whether the various autonomous processes on both sides are proceeding on a technical basis according to agreed deadlines".¹²

Nevertheless, despite the lack of progress on these issues, the UK agreed a new plan for intensified talks involving more full negotiating rounds in July, August and September and more restricted weekly rounds of talks involving the lead negotiators in July. The new schedule of talks was published on 12 June, shortly before the UK-EU high level meeting took place. At the high level meeting on 15 June, the Prime Minister and EU leader welcomed the new schedule of talks and agreed that new momentum was required (see section 1.7).

In his [statement](#) following the fourth round of negotiations on 5 June, Michel Barnier set a deadline of 31 October to finalise an agreement. He said:

Taking into account the time needed to ratify a deal, we would need a full legal text by 31 October at the latest ...

The Government has indicated that it now wants an agreement finalised by September. On 29 June, the Prime Minister's spokesman said:

We've always been clear that talks can't go on into the autumn. We need to make progress as soon as possible.

... I think we have spoken in the past about not wanting to be continuing having talks in October.¹³

On 28 June, the Government [announced](#) that the UK's lead negotiator David Frost would be taking over the role of National Security Adviser

¹⁰ European Commission, [Press statement by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič following the second meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee](#), 12 June 2020.

¹¹ Council of the EU, [EU-UK relations: Council adopts conclusions](#), 25 June 2020

¹² HM Government, [The Future Relationship with the EU: The UK's Approach to Negotiations](#), CP211, February 2020, para 9

¹³ *The Guardian*, [Politics Live](#), 29 June 2020

from September. This was interpreted as an indication that it expected negotiations with the EU to be over by then.

Some commentators have continued to suggest that the transition period could still be extended if the UK and EU decide later in the year that more time is needed to complete the negotiations or to implement a new agreement, despite the deadline in the WA having passed. This could involve a new transition or implementation period being agreed as part of a new UK-EU agreement rather than through the Withdrawal Agreement. This might prove difficult to agree and to ratify ahead of 31 December. The EU would also have to find a legal basis to do this, which could pose difficulties.¹⁴

1.4 New Negotiating schedule

On 12 June, the UK and EU published an addendum to the terms of reference of the negotiations. This set out a new negotiating schedule “in order to intensify the talks and to create the most conducive conditions for concluding and ratifying a deal before the end of 2020”.

The new schedule provides for further negotiating rounds to take place in July, August and in September “unless agreed otherwise between the parties”. Subject to any constraints required by the relevant national health recommendations, negotiating groups will meet physically, alternately in Brussels and London (if recommended by health authorities, meetings could however revert to videoconference). Negotiations would also take place in between these full negotiating rounds in more restricted formats.

The more restricted formats would involve meetings of the chief negotiators and their teams and more specialised sessions. The specialised sessions would address issues of particular difficulty in the negotiations “to ensure that parallel progress is achieved across all workstreams”.

The following schedule for July and August was set out in the addendum:

- Restricted round in the format of a meeting of the Chief Negotiators and of specialised sessions: week of 29 June to 3 July (Brussels)
- Meetings of the Chief Negotiators / their teams / specialised sessions: week of 6 July (London)
- Meetings of the Chief Negotiators / their teams / specialised sessions: week of 13 July (Brussels)
- Full negotiating round 5: week of 20 July to 24 July (London)

¹⁴ See Commons Library briefing paper 8929, [UK-EU future relationship negotiating timetable: extending the transition](#) (section 6) for further discussion of the possible way in which some form of extended transition period could be agreed once the WA deadline has passed. See also the Institute for Government report, [Implementing Brexit - Securing more time](#), 30 May 2020; and Catherine Barnard, [Can the Brexit transition period still be extended?, UK in a Changing Europe](#), 30 June 2020.

- Meetings of the Chief Negotiators / their teams / specialised sessions : week of 27 July (London)
- Full negotiating round 6: week of 17 August to 21 August (Brussels)

The *Telegraph* reported on 11 June that the UK Government had suggested that talks enter the “tunnel” in July. This would mean private negotiations under media blackout and without regular EU briefings of Member State representatives, as had occurred in periods leading up to the Withdrawal Agreement in 2018 and 2019. However, Michel Barnier reportedly told Member State representatives that the two sides were too far apart on issues including fisheries, the level playing field and the role of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) to go into the “tunnel”. The *Telegraph* reported that Mr Barnier had said the UK had to show willingness to compromise on its red lines first before the talks could enter this stage.¹⁵

1.5 UK and EU negotiating objectives

Following the [Council Decision](#) establishing the EU’s negotiating mandate on 25 February, the Government published its negotiating approach in a command paper, [The Future Relationship with the EU: the UK’s Approach to Negotiations](#), on 27 February.

The EU negotiating directives propose an economic partnership, a security partnership and co-operation on other issues within a single overarching governance structure. This would have a dispute resolution system in which the CJEU provides interpretations of questions of EU law.

Both the EU and UK agree on the aim of zero-tariff and zero-quota trade between the UK and EU. The EU is, however, only prepared to grant this “privileged” access to its market if the UK agrees to “robust” level playing field commitments and an agreement on fisheries providing continuity in access to UK waters.

The EU’s proposal for a security partnership provides for termination of law enforcement and judicial co-operation if the UK were to denounce the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or abrogate domestic law giving effect to it.

The UK command paper proposes a suite of agreements, with agreements on fishing, aviation, nuclear co-operation and law enforcement and judicial co-operation, separate to its proposed free trade agreement. These agreements would have their own distinct governance arrangements.

The Government rules out regulatory alignment with the EU, jurisdiction of the CJEU and supranational control over the UK in any area of the proposed agreements. In particular, the UK will not agree to be bound by “level playing field” obligations, such as, for example, rules on government subsidies to industry, workers’ rights and environmental

¹⁵ *The Telegraph*, [Michel Barnier blocks UK plan for secret 'tunnel' talks on Brexit trade deal](#), 11 June 2020.

protection. On fisheries it proposes annual negotiations with the EU and rejects continuity in terms of EU access to UK waters.

On the proposed security partnership, the Government says that the agreement should not specify how the UK or EU protect and enforce human rights within their legal systems. While the EU has proposed that the security partnership also encompasses foreign affairs and defence co-operation, the Government does not view co-operation in these areas as requiring a treaty framework.

The UK and EU negotiating positions are analysed in more detail in the Commons Library briefing paper 8834, [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: process and issues](#).

1.6 The negotiations so far

The first three rounds

The first round of negotiations on the future UK-EU relationship took place from 2 to 5 March 2020. On 18 March, the EU published a [draft treaty text](#) on 18 March covering all aspects of the EU's envisaged future relationship with the UK.

Statements from the UK and EU following these negotiating rounds referred to differences between the two sides on several issues, with four principal sticking points: i) [governance of the future relationship](#) including treaty architecture and dispute resolution mechanisms; ii) the ["level playing field"](#) to ensure "open and fair" competition; iii) [fisheries](#); and iv) police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters.

Following the third round of negotiations, the UK Government published the [ten draft treaty texts](#) it had tabled in the negotiations. The UK and EU proposals for the future relationship, as set out in their respective treaty texts and previous documents, are compared in Commons Library briefing paper 8920 [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: summary of positions](#).

For more detailed discussion of the first three rounds of negotiations, and analysis of the EU's proposed draft treaty text see Commons Briefing Paper 8923 [The UK-EU future relationship: the March 2020 EU draft treaty and negotiations update](#).

The negotiating positions in specific sectors are analysed in the following briefing papers:

Commons Library briefing paper 8943 [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: governance](#)

Commons Library briefing paper 8852 [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: Level playing field](#)

Commons Library briefing paper 8927 [Fisheries: UK-EU future relationship negotiations](#)

Commons Library briefing paper 8832 [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: Transport](#)

Commons Library briefing paper 8928 [The UK-EU future relationship negotiations: social security co-ordination](#)

Commons Library briefing paper 8394 [Brexit: energy and climate change](#)

The fourth round of negotiations

EU statement

In his statement at the end of the fourth round on 5 June, the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier said that the negotiators had dedicated time to make progress on the four major sticking points of fisheries, level playing field, governance and police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters. However, there had been "no substantial progress".

On fisheries, he said that the UK had not shown willingness to explore "other approaches than zonal attachment on quota sharing" and was continuing to press for an annual negotiating process for access to its waters. He said this was "technically impossible" for the EU, and that the EU wanted a more stable framework.

On police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, he said there had been a "slightly more constructive discussion on the question of commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights" but that "important questions remain as to how to reflect this commitment in our agreement". He later said that the movement on this point still fell short of what was agreed in the Political Declaration.

Taking into account the UK's refusal to extend the post-Brexit transition period, Mr Barnier set out a deadline of 31 October by which an agreed "full legal text" would be needed. This would give the necessary time to ratify the agreement in time for the end of the transition period on 31 December.

He said the remaining time would need to be used "in the best possible way". For this reason, he said he had suggested the previous week to the chief UK negotiator David Frost that talks proceed "with more restricted formats so that we can concentrate on the more difficult issues". These would proceed alongside the broader negotiating rounds involving large teams of negotiators across 11 different negotiating subgroups (set out in the [original terms of reference](#)).

Mr Barnier said he hoped this would "inject new political dynamism in the 11 negotiating tables" and that the negotiators would also "be able to meet physically again in the coming weeks and months, as this could help us gain in efficiency".

Mr Barnier said that on all these points, the EU was "asking for nothing more" than what was agreed in the [Political Declaration \(PD\)](#).

He reiterated that the EU position in the negotiations was on the basis of the PD. He said that this had been "negotiated with and approved by Prime Minister Johnson" and also approved by the EU Member States. He said the PD would remain "the only valid reference" for the EU but noted that in "*round after round*, our British counterparts seek to distance themselves from this common basis".

Mr Barnier gave four examples of where he said the UK was distancing itself from the PD. These were:

1. On the “level playing field” in relation to which paragraph 77 of the PD said that the two parties agreed that the future relationship would “encompass robust commitments to prevent distortions of trade and unfair competitive advantages” and that this would entail upholding “the common high standards applicable in the Union and the UK at the end of the transition period” in the areas of: state aid, competition, social and employment standards, environment, climate change, and relevant tax matters.
2. On civil nuclear co-operation, where the two parties agreed in paragraph 66 of the PD “to maintain our existing high standards of nuclear safety”.
3. On anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing, which the two parties agreed in paragraph 82 of the PD the future relationship agreement would cover.
4. On governance, in relation to which the two parties agreed in in paragraph 118 of the PD, to base the future relationship “on an overarching institutional framework, with links between specific areas of cooperation”.

On each of these points, Mr Barnier said that the two parties were “very far from this objective”. He also noted that the UK was refusing to talk about our co-operation on foreign policy and defence, even though this had been agreed in the PD.

He said that the UK was backtracking on commitments made in the PD and that the EU could not accept this.¹⁶

UK statement

In his statement following the fourth round, the UK’s chief negotiator David Frost said that while progress remained limited, the talks had been “positive in tone”. He said that negotiations would continue and the UK remained “committed to a successful outcome”.

He agreed that there was a need to intensify the talks, possibly through face to face meetings. He said:

We are now at an important moment for these talks. We are close to reaching the limits of what we can achieve through the format of remote formal Rounds. If we are to make progress, it is clear that we must intensify and accelerate our work. We are discussing with the Commission how this can best be done.

We need to conclude this negotiation in good time to enable people and businesses to have certainty about the trading terms that will follow the end of the transition period at the end of this year, and, if necessary, to allow ratification of any agreements reached.

For our part we are willing to work hard to see whether at least the outline of a balanced agreement, covering all issues, can be

¹⁶ European Commission, [Statement by Michel Barnier following Round 4 of negotiations for a new partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom](#), 5 June 2020

reached soon. Any such deal must of course accommodate the reality of the UK's well-established position on the so-called "level playing field", on fisheries, and the other difficult issues.

1.7 The high level UK-EU meeting

The high level meeting envisaged by the Political Declaration took place on 15 June by videoconference. The EU was represented by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Council Charles Michel, and the President of the European Parliament David Sassoli. Boris Johnson, David Frost and Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove took part [on the UK side](#).

The UK and EU issued a joint statement following the meeting. With regard to the negotiations it said:

The Parties welcomed the constructive discussions on the future relationship that had taken place under the leadership of Chief Negotiators David Frost and Michel Barnier, allowing both sides to clarify and further understand positions. They noted that four rounds had been completed and texts exchanged despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Parties agreed nevertheless that new momentum was required. They supported the plans agreed by Chief Negotiators to intensify the talks in July and to create the most conducive conditions for concluding and ratifying a deal before the end of 2020. This should include, if possible, finding an early understanding on the principles underlying any agreement.

The Parties underlined their intention to work hard to deliver a relationship, which would work in the interests of the citizens of the Union and of the United Kingdom. They also confirmed their commitment to the full and timely implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The two parties also noted the UK's decision not to request any extension to the transition period, which would thus end on 31 December 2020.

It was reported that during the meeting that the Prime Minister told the EU leaders that he was committed to the PD. Following the meeting, Mr Johnson said he had told the EU Presidents to "[put a tiger in the tank](#)". He said it was very clear what the UK needed and what the EU needed to understand, and this was that

... we can't have the involvement of the European court of justice in this country; we can't have a system whereby we continue to have to obey EU law even when we're out of the EU and we've got to get a great deal for our fish ...

Mr Johnson added that:

I don't think we're that far apart, but what we need is a bit of oomph in the negotiations, and I was pleased that Ursula von der Leyen [and other EU officials] all agree ... There is no reason why we shouldn't get this done in July.¹⁷

¹⁷ *The Guardian*, [Boris Johnson: no reason why Brexit deal cannot be sealed in July](#), 15 June 2020.

The European Council President Charles Michel said the EU was: “[Ready to put a tiger in the tank but not to buy a pig in a poke](#)” and that a level playing field “is essential”.

1.8 European Parliament resolution

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU-UK negotiations by a large majority on 18 June, setting out the EP’s detailed position on issues covered by the negotiations. The resolution reflected input from 17 European Parliament specialised committees and the Parliament’s [United Kingdom Coordination Group](#) (UKCG).¹⁸ This restated positions previously set out by the Parliament, and the Parliament’s support for the approach being taken by the European Commission and Michel Barnier in the negotiations. It expressed regret at the lack of progress in the negotiations and deep concern at

the limited scope of the future partnership envisaged by the UK Government and its piecemeal approach to negotiations only on areas that are in the interest of the UK: reiterates that such a “cherry-picking” approach is unacceptable for the EU; points out that the UK’s proposals fall short of its commitments under the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, to which the UK agreed, including its refusal to negotiate an agreement on security and defence matters;

The resolution also reiterated the EU position that tangible progress must be achieved in all areas of negotiations in parallel “including on the level playing field, fisheries, internal security and governance, as outlined in the Political Declaration” and that EU would not agree to a free trade agreement (FTA) without having robust level playing field guarantees and a satisfactory agreement on fisheries. It said it fully supported the Commission’s proposal for a comprehensive draft treaty rather than the separate agreements proposed by the UK. Regarding the content of the UK agreements it said that “contrary to the UK’s claims of using existing precedents, many of those proposals go significantly beyond what has been negotiated by the EU in other FTAs with third countries in recent years”.

The resolution set out a number of principles that a future EU-UK association agreement with the EU needed to be in accordance with (European Parliament consent is required for EU association agreements and other types of agreements). These principles include:

- the role of the CJEU as the ultimate body responsible for interpreting EU law;
- continued adherence to human rights principles and UK continued commitment to respect the framework of the ECHR;
- a level playing field, ensuring high equivalent standards in social, labour, environmental and consumer protection, the fight against climate change, and taxation, competition and State aid policies. This must be guaranteed through effective dispute settlement and enforcement mechanisms. Any future agreement should be made

¹⁸ This is the successor to the Parliament’s Brexit Steering Group, and is chaired by the German Christian Democrat MEP David McAllister.

fully conditional on respect for the Paris Agreement on climate change.¹⁹

1.9 Michel Barnier meeting with Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU

Michel Barnier had a private meeting with the House of Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU on 8 June. The transcript of the meeting was published on 19 June²⁰. Mr Barnier described the end of the transition period as the “economic and commercial Brexit” following on from the UK’s withdrawal from the EU (which he has described as the “political” or “institutional” Brexit). He said there needed to be a decision as to whether the UK leaves the customs union and the single market “with a sustainable agreement between us, or without an agreement”, although in either of these scenarios there would be significant changes in the economic relationship. He said that what the EU was looking for from the UK side was:

A change and some kind of political impulse to ensure that more realism is injected into the conditions for access to the European market.

He reiterated that the EU saw the PD as the principal reference point for the negotiations, that this was agreed by the Prime Minister and the 27 EU heads of state and government and that it expected this text “to be translated legally into a treaty text”.

He stressed that the EU’s positions were “not born out of some kind of technocratic and bureaucratic vision held by the European Commission” but was set by the Heads of State and Government, and by the European Parliament. He said his mandate was “to defend the interests of the European Union and European Union countries—nothing else”. He added:

Of course, as a negotiator, I have a fairly clear idea of where there is room for manoeuvre in these discussions, and that is linked to the trust that you have shown in me. I am ready to use that room for manoeuvre as proactively as possible in order to seek out compromise, but compromise will never come about to the detriment of the interests of the European Union and our people.

On the level playing field Mr Barnier reiterated the EU’s position on why it was necessary and said he had “some room for manoeuvre” for how to bring this about. He said that the proposal the EU had made was “unusual” and was not based on precedent, but related to the volume of trade and geographical proximity between the UK and EU. He said the EU wanted a “serious and rigorous mechanism” on state aid and

¹⁹ [European Parliament recommendation of 18 June 2020 on the negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#). See also European Parliament Press release, [EU-UK talks: MEPs united behind EU stance, rejecting UK cherry-picking](#), 12 June 2020.

²⁰ Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union, [Oral evidence: Private Virtual Meeting](#), 8 June 2020

other level playing field areas, and that he was ready to work in a constructive way to seek out the solutions.

On fisheries he said that no-one was calling into question UK sovereignty over UK waters, but that nevertheless the EU “would like to find a sustainable, balanced agreement on reciprocal access to waters and on fishing in those waters”. This would be a requirement for an agreement on trade. He said that the fisheries ministers of EU coastal states had given him a mandate “and that mandate allows me to work and try to find a compromise”. He said he had the endorsement of the Heads of State and Government, and Ministers, “to work – informally, even - on the different parameters that could constitute the basis for a compromise agreement”. He later said he thought there were grounds “for finding an agreement that takes into account all interests of zonal attachment, historic rights and protecting local communities” and that the EU was ready to discuss an agreement “somewhere between” the UK and EU positions. He said this agreement would cover “not just access to water and fish, but also market access”.

Mr Barnier said he was confident that the two sides could reach an agreement “in the very short amount of time that we have left before 31 October”. But the EU would also be ready for a no-deal scenario, although this is not what it wanted. He said if no agreement had been reached before 31 October to allow time for ratification, there would be a cliff edge on 31 December. The EU is intensifying preparations for such a scenario, and would take unilateral contingency measures if this was the case. If there was an agreement, then there might be an opportunity for further discussions in the future on areas not covered by the agreement. This, Mr Barnier suggested, might include areas that the UK does not want to discuss at the moment, such as defence and foreign policy.

1.10 Report of Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU

A report on the negotiations by the House of Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU was published on 19 June.²¹ The report called on the Government to seek to make as much progress in the negotiations as possible over the next few months and urged the EU to give Michel Barnier greater flexibility in his mandate in the interests of securing an agreement. It said that it remained in the best interest of both the UK and the EU to reach a deal and that political leadership was therefore essential to break the deadlock. It said that both sides will need to compromise and “show where they are willing to move”.

It proposed a solution on the level playing field issue as follows:

We urge the parties to look for a solution that takes as its starting point the de facto alignment of the UK and the EU when it comes to current rules and standards, and explore how the UK and the EU could be given access to their respective markets on the basis

²¹ Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union [The need for progress in the negotiations](#), House of Commons, HC458, 19 June 2020

that if either side moves away from these standards or acts in a way that one side believes gives the other an unfair competitive advantage then that access could be varied. For example, progress in relation to the “level playing field” might be made if both parties considered an arrangement where the UK had the freedom to set its own level-playing field standards but, if those standards fell below the standards which were in place at the end of the transition period or if standards were changed in such a way that gave the UK an unfair competitive advantage, the EU could suspend parts of the trade agreement. An independent body would be needed to rule on whether the change gave rise to an unfair competitive advantage and whether the EU’s proposed action was reasonable. In relation to subsidies, both sides could agree to have in place clear rules on the granting of subsidies/state aid that would be monitored and enforced on the EU side by the Commission and on the UK side by an independent authority. If one party considered that a subsidy granted by the other party was adversely affecting its interests, it could make a complaint to the Commission or the UK independent authority which would have to be investigated and then referred to the independent body. This could offer a way forward in the negotiations in line with the Political Declaration.

On law enforcement and judicial co-operation, the report noted the different positions of UK and EU. One sticking point is the EU position that the agreement would be conditional on the UK’s adherence to the ECHR, while the UK Government has said that the agreement should not specify how the UK or EU Member States enforce human rights domestically. The report cites evidence from Professor Catherine Barnard who suggested one way forward would be for the agreement to state that if the UK decided to abrogate human rights protection (e.g. by deciding to withdraw from the ECHR and terminating the Human Rights Act “at the same time”), then the EU could terminate provisions in the agreement on law enforcement and surrender. Another approach would be to look at the UK’s human rights regime in the round rather than focusing solely on the ECHR, by taking into account protections in the common law in conjunction with various international agreements.

The Committee also urged the UK Government to take steps to improve the involvement of the devolved nations.

1.11 Michel Barnier evidence to the House of Lords EU Committee

Michel Barnier met with the House of Lords EU Committee in private on 23 June. The transcript of the session was published on 6 July.²² Mr Barnier said that the UK had adopted a dual strategy in the negotiations so far, which he found unacceptable:

On the one hand, the UK, in each of the sectors, is asking for a status that is more or less equivalent to that of a member state for the single market, the customs union, Schengen, rules of origin, mutual recognition, financial services, professional qualifications, data flow and exchange of electricity. So you are actually asking for the advantages of being a member state without having the

²² House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, [Oral evidence: Progress of UK-EU future relationship negotiations](#), 23 June 2020.

limitations and the discipline. It is general cherry picking, and that is not acceptable to us.

The second strategy, which is equally clear, is that the UK wants to keep complete freedom to deregulate or to get involved in regulatory competition against us in relation to data, financial services and state aid. We are still waiting to hear what the UK's national policy will be. Then there is this completely surprising request that the withdrawal agreement be reopened to deal with geographical indications. That is equally unacceptable to us.

So we have a dual problem, if I can put it like that. We need the UK to understand very clearly that if it wants an agreement on all the subjects that were adopted in the political declaration, it has to remain faithful to the political declaration and not ask for other things that are quite clearly counter to European interests.

He said that given that it was the UK that had decided to leave the EU, there was “no reason for Europeans to sacrifice our economic interests—the interests of consumers on our continent—just to benefit British industry”. He said the EU would never sacrifice its political and economic interests in this way, and that there was a need to be more realistic. He also said that the EU needed reassurances over the implementation of the WA. He said the EU was concerned about the lack of operational and technical detail from the UK on the operation of the WA protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, and was looking forward to receiving clarification from the UK Government over the coming weeks.

Mr Barnier was asked about the possibility of there being mechanisms in place to enable businesses and others to adjust to new arrangements if an agreement was reached. He said that the possibility of having more time had passed with the deadline for extending the transition period on 30 June. He said the EU had been open to an extension “even a precautionary extension, in case of need, making allowance for one before 30 June, even if in practice we did not need to use it, or all of it”. He said the EU had been updating its sectoral notices to prepare for the eventuality of a no-deal scenario, and had recruited customs officers in the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Ireland to carry out checks on products coming into the EU. The EU would therefore be ready for the changes on 31 December, whether or not there was an agreement. If there was an agreement, it would need to be ready for implementation on 31 December.

1.12 Intensified negotiating rounds, June to July 2020

The [agenda](#) for the first week of the new intensified rounds of talks was published by the UK and EU on 25 June. This set out a timetable for five days of talks in Brussels, beginning and ending with meetings of the chief negotiators on the mornings of 29 June and 3 July. There would be separate negotiating sessions from 29 June to 2 July on particular sectors and thematic areas, with two sessions left open on the afternoon of 2 July for “cross-workstream discussion or other follow up”.

Ahead of the talks, David Frost posted a [tweet thread](#) in which he said:

This needs to be a real negotiation and some of the EU's unrealistic positions will have to change if we are to move forward. We have noted carefully what the EU has said in recent days on this subject and look forward to discussing it.

UK sovereignty, over our laws, our courts, or our fishing waters, is of course not up for discussion. Equally we do not seek anything which would undermine the integrity of the EU's single market.

Finally, I want to be clear that the Government will not agree to ideas like the one currently circulating giving the EU a new right to retaliate with tariffs if we chose to make laws suiting our interests. We could not leave ourselves open to such unforeseeable economic risk.

The two lead negotiators both issued statements on the 2 July indicating that the talks had already ended. It was [reported](#) that the negotiations had ended a day early with the meeting of lead negotiators scheduled for the 3 July cancelled.

In his statement on 2 July, David Frost said that the talks had been completed in "just over three days". He noted that the talks were the first face to face since March "and this has given extra depth and flexibility to our discussions".

He said that the "negotiations have been comprehensive and useful" but that they had "also underlined the significant differences that still remain between us on a number of important issues".

He said the UK remained committed "to working hard to find an early understanding on the principles underlying an agreement out of the intensified talks process during July", as agreed at the High Level Meeting.²³

Michel Barnier's statement on 2 July explained that the talks that week had involved the two lead negotiators together with a restricted number of experts on each side. He said the goal was "to get negotiations successfully and quickly on a trajectory to reach an agreement". But he said that "serious divergences" remained. Furthermore he said:

The EU side had listened carefully to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's statements in recent weeks, in particular, his request to reach a political agreement quickly, and his red lines: no role for the European Court of Justice in the UK; no obligation for the UK to continue to be bound by EU law; and an agreement on fisheries that shows Brexit makes a real difference.

He said however, that the EU's position remained, as based on the PD, that there would be no economic partnership without robust level playing field guarantees, a balanced long-term solution on fisheries, and an overarching institutional framework with effective dispute settlement mechanisms.

²³ No 10 media blog, [David Frost's statement following the conclusion of the round of negotiations with the EU, w/c 29 June](#), 2 July 2020.

He added that the EU would continue to insist on parallel progress on all areas.²⁴

The BBC reported that very little progress had been made in the talks, but cited EU officials who said that “one positive is that the UK now appears to understand our position more clearly on the areas of disagreement”. It also reported that officials on both sides were downplaying the decision to end talks early that week.²⁵

The agenda for the following week of talks was not published. A Downing Street spokesperson said that [talks would take place](#) from 7 to 9 July rather than the usual four to five days of talks, and would be more informal. Following the talks, Mr Barnier [reportedly debriefed](#) Member States that there was “no progress” and the UK side was not showing signs of compromising. Despite this, there was some confidence that a deal could be done in time.

²⁴ European Commission, [Statement by Michel Barnier following the restricted round of negotiations for a new partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom](#), 2 July 2020.

²⁵ BBC News website, [Brexit: Serious differences over trade deal, say UK and EU](#), 2 July 2020

2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[**Brexit: UK and EU agree not to extend transition period beyond December 2020**](#)

Euro News
Alasdair Sandford and Alice Tidey
16 June 2020

[**Brexit: Checks on EU imports to be phased-in amid coronavirus crisis**](#)

BBC News Online
12 June 2020

[**EU states warn Brussels of hard Brexit risk to coronavirus plans**](#)

Financial Times
Sam Fleming and Mehreen Khan
10 June 2020

[**How the Coronavirus Makes a No-Deal Brexit More Likely**](#)

New York Times
Mark Landler and Stephen Castle
5 June 2020

[**Does the coronavirus crisis make a no-deal Brexit more likely?**](#)

Deutsche Welle
Arthur Sullivan
4 June 2020

[**Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): the case for extending the Brexit transition period**](#)

Scottish Government
3 June 2020

[**The Coronavirus Traps Brexit and Boris Johnson**](#)

Carnegie Europe
Peter Kellner
2 June 2020

[**Brexit and COVID-19: An end to both in 2020?**](#)

The Parliament Magazine
Mairead McGuinness
13 May 2020

'They can effectively blame Covid for everything': What coronavirus means for Brexit talks

The Independent
Jon Stone
11 May 2020

The coronavirus response means the government will need to extend the Brexit transition period

Institute for Government
Joe Owen
15 April 2020

Coronavirus could be final straw for EU, European experts warn

The Guardian
Jennifer Rankin
1 April 2020

Brexit: coronavirus sparks calls to extend EU transition period

The Guardian
Michael Savage
14 March 2020

3. PQs

[Agriculture: Labour Market](#)

29 Jun 2020 | 61709

Asked by: Nick Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the combined effect of the UK leaving the EU and covid-19 travel restrictions on the agricultural labour market in 2020.

Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Free movement continues until the end of the Transition Period, which is the end of this year. In future, any EU citizen wishing to come to live and work in the UK will need to apply under the UK's future immigration system. Agricultural businesses will continue to be able to rely on EU nationals living in the UK with settled or pre-settled status. We have guaranteed the rights of all EU citizens and their families already living in the UK. The EU Settlement Scheme, which opened in March 2019, has already received more than 3.5 million applications from EU citizens who are able to stay and work in the UK and there is still over a year until the application deadline of 30 June 2021

The Seasonal Workers Pilot is providing thousands of workers to farms across the UK this year. Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 have delayed the arrival of some Pilot workers. Defra and the Home Office are working closely with the operators of the Pilot to enable workers to reach the UK, including facilitating the re-opening of Visa Application Centres in Ukraine and Belarus on 1 June. This has allowed significant numbers of Pilot workers from those countries to obtain a visa and travel to the UK.

Defra has been working closely with the sector and other Government departments to closely monitor and respond to the agricultural labour market this year. Industry feedback indicates the demand for seasonal workers is currently being met, but we know this may change in the coming months and we are closely monitoring the situation.

[EU Relationship](#)

24 Jun 2020 | 677 c1300

Asked by: Brendan Clarke-Smith

I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Does he agree that, with business facing the hardest level of uncertainty in our lifetime because of coronavirus, it would be an enormous mistake to do as many Opposition Members are suggesting and extend the transition, the talks and all the unwanted uncertainty, delaying the start of our new relationship indefinitely?

Answered by: Brandon Lewis | Department: Northern Ireland

My hon. Friend is quite right. First, extending the transition period would bind us into future EU laws, without us having any say, yet we

could still have to foot the bill. Secondly, extending the transition period would simply prolong the negotiations and increase uncertainty for business. That is why we will not extend the transition period. This country needs to be able to design our own rules in our own best interests, and that is what we will do.

Support for Small Businesses and the Self-Employed

18 Jun 2020 | 677 c936

Asked by: Virendra Sharma

Do the Government recognise that, aside from covid-19, one of the biggest threats to small businesses in the UK is reaching the end of the transition period with no trade deal? What assessment have they made of the number of SMEs in the UK that would go bust if faced with the toxic combination of covid-19 and a no-deal Brexit in December?

Answered by: Graham Stuart | Department: International Trade
The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the importance of SMEs. They need Government support to enter international markets, and that is why the DIT exists. We are not responsible for negotiation with the EU, but we are confident that we will reach a good deal with it. The Department is putting SME chapters in our trade deals with other countries. It is a pity that the Labour party opposes every trade agreement and continually shows its indifference to small business and enterprise, but I am looking to the hon. Gentleman, as he may be able to do what no others have done and lead the shadow Secretary of State away from being an enemy of business and towards supporting it, as he does.

Engagements

17 Jun 2020 | 677 c800

Asked by: Sir Edward Davey

Due to the covid crisis, tens of thousands of British businesses face bankruptcy and millions of British people face redundancy. In Britain's hour of need, will the Prime Minister put the practical imperative of saving jobs before his Brexit ideology, rather than risk a bad deal or a no deal due to the deadline set before coronavirus? Why does the Prime Minister not show some good old-fashioned British common sense, give our economy the chance to breathe, and accept the EU's offer of a delay?

Answered by: The Prime Minister | Department: Prime Minister

I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that there is another way of looking at it. The first point is that the people of this country are heartily sick of us going on about Brexit. They wanted to get it done. We got it done and we are going to move forward. The other point is that when we come to the end of the transition period, we will be able to do things differently. We will be able to respond to our economic needs in a creative and constructive way, looking at regulation and looking at ways in which we support industries in a way that we have not been able to do before. That will be very productive for this country. Let us not delay that moment; let us get on with it.

Manifesto Commitments

16 Jun 2020 | 803 c2048

Asked by: Baroness Randerson

My Lords, even at the time of the general election, the haulage industry was seriously worried about the additional bureaucracy that a potential no-deal Brexit would bring. It has now suffered the crisis of the pandemic, and the Government are no nearer to getting a deal. Does the Minister accept that our haulage industry will not be able to cope with any further challenges this year? Do the Government accept that the transition period needs to be extended, as the haulage industry has requested?

Answered by: Lord True

I pay tribute to the haulage industry; it has been an outstanding performer, and not just in this crisis. However, the answer to the noble Baroness's question is no. The transition period will not be extended. That has been accepted by the European Union, and I suggest it is about time that it was accepted by your Lordships' House.

Economic Situation

15 Jun 2020 | HL5134

Asked by: Lord Truscott

Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the combined economic cost to the UK of Brexit and COVID-19.

Answering member: Lord Agnew of Oulton

| Department: Treasury

HM Treasury does not produce forecasts of the economy or public finances.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is responsible for producing forecasts of the economy and public finances. Their forecasts incorporate their assessment of the economic and fiscal impact of EU exit.

On 14 April the OBR published a reference scenario assessing the potential impact of coronavirus. In this scenario GDP is assumed to fall by 35 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 before recovering in subsequent quarters. The OBR note that the Government's policy response should help limit the long-term damage to the economy and public finances.

The economic impact of our relationship with the EU is subject to thriving public debate amongst analysts. The specifics of EU exit depend on the outcome of detailed negotiations. We will continue to keep Parliament informed with appropriate analysis at appropriate times in a way that does not impede our ability to strike the best deal for the UK.

Topical Questions

11 Jun 2020 | 677 c243

Asked by: Peter Grant

This morning, the Confederation of British Industry told the BBC that the resilience of British business to a no-deal Brexit in December is absolutely on the floor. The director general warned that if the Government insist on a political timescale that takes us to the last minute to get a deal in December, it will be catastrophic for British business. He finished by saying that just because the house is on fire, it does not mean that we should set fire to the garden shed as well. What economic analysis have the Government done on the likely impact of a no-deal Brexit in the middle of a covid crisis?

Answered by: Michael Gove | Department: Cabinet Office

We cannot have a no-deal Brexit because we had a Brexit deal that was agreed and voted on in the House of Commons, which is why we left the European Union on 31 January.

UK Relations with EU: Coronavirus

04 Jun 2020 | HL4795

Asked by: Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on their ability to implement a future relationship agreement with the EU by 31 December.

Answering member: Lord True | Department: Cabinet Office

Negotiations on the future UK and EU relationship have continued despite the COVID-19 outbreak.

The UK and EU engaged in a full and constructive round of negotiations between 11 - 15 May. A Written Ministerial Statement was made by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 19 May updated the progress of negotiations, which I repeated in this House ([HLWS239](#)).

Future relationship discussions are ongoing, and the next round of negotiations began on 1 June.

Covid:19: Tourism Sector

04 Jun 2020 | 676 c990

Asked by: Gavin Newlands

Does the Secretary of State agree with the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, who warns that the tourism industry, which is already deprived of vital foreign workers due to visa restrictions and which supports more than 200,000 jobs and contributes over £7 billion to the Scottish economy, now faces the double whammy of a no-deal Brexit combined with the ongoing impact of covid-19? Does this not justify a further extension of the job retention scheme to support the sector, and an extension of the transition period to avoid a deeply damaging no-deal scenario, compounding the horrendous coronavirus circumstances?

Answered by: Oliver Dowden | Department: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

We have already extended the job retention scheme through to October. On the hon. Gentleman's point about a further extension of the transition period, I think the British people have been pretty clear about this. They just want us to get on and leave, and we will not be extending again.

**[EU: Plans for No Deal](#)
02 Jun 2020 | 803 c1287**

Asked by: Lord Dubs

My Lords, no one could have foreseen that the Covid-19 pandemic would take place when the withdrawal agreement was drawn up. Does the Minister agree that if there is a no-deal Brexit there is no contingency plan that can prevent enormous damage to the economy, jobs, business and industry? Furthermore, is he not aware that every reputable body and commentator says that we ought to extend the timetable in order that we can get a better deal for this country? Surely that is the way forward.

Answered by: Lord True | Department: Cabinet Office

My Lords, I do not agree with the noble Lord in the picture that he presents of either unpreparedness or impossibility. We will seek and are seeking a free trade agreement with the European Union and we are carrying on negotiations in a number of areas, including one that I know is important to him: we are committed to seeking reciprocal agreements with the EU, for example, for family reunion of unaccompanied children. This work goes on and it can be done.

**[Fisheries](#)
26 May 2020 | 48404**

Asked by: Neil Parish

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the UK fishing industry (a) during the covid-19 outbreak and (b) in preparation for the end of the transition period.

Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government remains committed to supporting the long-term profitability of our fishing industry in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. On 17 April 2020 it launched a £10 million financial assistance package for England's fishing and aquaculture businesses which included a £1 million grant scheme to support the sale of fish locally.

We have left the EU, and at the end of the Transition Period will leave the Common Fisheries Policy. We will take back control of our waters to secure a fairer share of fishing opportunities for the UK fishing industry and will develop a world-class fisheries management regime to the benefit of industry. The Fisheries Bill will give us the necessary powers to

manage fisheries as an independent coastal State. New, domestic, long-term funding arrangements will support the UK's fishing industry from 2021. We are working closely with the industry and others to ensure that the trade of seafood with the EU can continue after the end of the Transition Period.

A number of schemes are available to support fisheries and aquaculture businesses and a summary can be found via the link below:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/883851/Support_for_fishing_industry_one_stop_shop_v20.pdf

Engagements

13 May 2020 | 676 cc246-7

Asked by: Stewart Hosie

Both covid and Brexit are suppressing trade and damaging jobs and the economy and while we hope that, as covid ends, global trade will bounce back, there is no guarantee that that will happen quickly. The Prime Minister could mitigate some of this damage by seeking an extension to the Brexit transitional period. Will he explain to the House why he is being so negligent in not seeking that transitional extension now?

Answered by: The Prime Minister | Department: Prime Minister

As I have said, one of the most remarkable things about this crisis has been the way that the whole country has come together to deal with it. There has been a spirit of unity and sharing that we have not seen for a very long time. I do not think that a lot of people in this country want to see the Brexit argument reopened. They want to see it settled, they want to see it done, and that is what this Government intend to do.

Covid-19: Vulnerable People

12 May 2020 | 803 c570

Asked by: Lord Roberts of Llandudno

I am sure that we all agree that the voluntary sector needs our immediate support, and we plead with the Government to do that, but we must avoid increasing the number of vulnerable people. One such increase is unemployment. Even last September, the Governor of the Bank of England said that a hard Brexit could mean half a million more unemployed people. However, it is worse than that: we face not a hard Brexit but an impossible Brexit, an impossible deal. We must do everything we can, including extending the transition period from the end of December, because we cannot have fruitful ongoing discussions under the threat of the virus. Will the Government look again and extend that transition period?

Answered by: Baroness Barran

The Government are keeping all those issues under review. Their commitment to supporting people to stay in employment remains undiminished.

UK Relations with EU
06 May 2020 | HL3810

Asked by: The Earl of Sandwich

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the UK is participating in all EU meetings that may be dealing with the survival of UK citizens from COVID-19 or other similar threats.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon
| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Covid-19 is a major priority for the Government and we are engaging constructively with the EU and with our European and global partners to respond to the outbreak.

We continue to access all EU health security alerting systems, databases and networks during the transition period, including the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), which we have used to share information in response to the pandemic, and to attend EU Health Security Committee meetings where it is in our interests to do so.

Civil Service: Coronavirus
06 May 2020 | HL3083

Asked by: Baroness Smith of Gilmorehill

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the comments made by Sir David Lidington on 22 April, what assessment they have made of the available capacity of the Civil Service; and whether that capacity is sufficient to conclude a trade agreement with the EU at the same time as responding to COVID-19.

Answering member: Lord True | Department: Cabinet Office

At this time of national crisis, resources have been redirected to work on Covid-19. There is a robust resourcing process in place that can be used to increase resource capacity on EU exit related work if departments require. This is a temporary arrangement, and at all times consideration has been given to ensuring that sufficient resource remains in place to support negotiations and readiness in line with the end of the transition period on 31 December.

Transition Period: Extension
04 May 2020 | 675 c416

Asked by: Layla Moran

A YouGov poll released this weekend showed that half the population now think that the transition period should be extended, versus 35% who think the Government should press ahead. The public know that kicking the economy when it is down, especially with a no-deal Brexit on top of a covid crash, is in no one's best interests. The right hon. Gentleman said just now that there was a deal, but he knows full well that that is the withdrawal agreement and not the future deal that will determine the trade relationship. No deal is still on the table, so will the Government consider asking for even a short extension to avoid a no-deal Brexit, or are they intent on putting ideology before pragmatism?

Answered by: Michael Gove | Department: Cabinet Office

This Government always put pragmatism and the interests of the British people first. The hon. Lady mentioned a YouGov poll. There was another poll, on 12 December last year; it was called a general election, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) secured a majority in order to take this country out of the European Union on the basis of the deal that he negotiated. The Liberal Democrats took part in that poll. I cannot recall exactly how well they did, but it certainly the case that they were not entrusted by the British people with the discharge of policy on our relationship with the EU.

[EU Withdrawal Agreement: Covid-19](#)

04 May 2020 | 675 c415

Asked by: Pete Wishart

Is it not the case that what businesses want more than anything else is certainty that this Government will not do anything to compound the economic difficulties caused by this pandemic? The Government could not of course do anything to stop covid coming to our shores, but it is in their hands to stop further economic misery from a disastrous Brexit. Does the Minister agree that the last thing businesses need is more economic turbulence and that the certainty they seek is one that says there will be no no-deal Brexit and there will be an extension to let them recover from this pandemic?

Answered by: Michael Gove | Department: Cabinet Office

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the point he makes. There will not be a no-deal Brexit; we have a deal, and that deal was legislated for in the House of Commons. I think he is right: it is important that we give business certainty, and I think one of the best ways of giving business certainty is recognising that we respect referendums. That is why this House has voted to respect the referendum that saw the British people take us out of the European Union, and I would urge him and others to respect the referendum that made it clear that the people of Scotland want to stay in the United Kingdom, instead of having the damaging uncertainty of an indyref2 hanging over future investment decisions.

[EU Withdrawal Agreement: Covid-19](#)

04 May 2020 | 675 c414

Asked by: Wes Streeting

Everyone will understand that we have left the European Union and everyone will understand that the impact of covid-19 might have an impact on the timetable for negotiating our future relationship, so why will the Minister not give businesses the reassurance they need that if the Government need more time, they will take more time? Is it dogma; is it vanity; or is it paranoia?

Answered by: Michael Gove | Department: Cabinet Office

The hon. Gentleman provides a helpful list of conditions, but it is none of those. It is plain prudence. Were we to perpetuate our membership

of the European Union-lite through the transition period, we would end up spending more taxpayers' money, which could be spent on the NHS. We would have to accept new EU rules that might constrain our ability to fight covid-19 and to deal with other crises, and we would, of course, be unfortunately and unfairly trespassing on the EU's need to concentrate on other vital priorities.

[Brexit: Coronavirus](#)

28 Apr 2020 | HL3249

Asked by: Lord Bowness

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to extend the Brexit transition period in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Answering member: Lord True | Department: Cabinet Office

The Government was elected on a manifesto which made clear the transition period would end on 31 December 2020. This is now enshrined in primary legislation and it remains our policy.

Extending the transition period would simply prolong the negotiations, prolong business uncertainty, and delay the moment of control of our borders. Extending the transition period would mean we will have to make further payments into the EU budget. It would also keep us bound by EU legislation, at a point when we need legislative and economic flexibility to manage the UK response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

4. Early Day Motions

[Extension of EU transition period](#)

EDM 497 (session 2019-21)

Ian Blackford

18 May 2020

That this House notes with concern the UK Government's stated position to stick rigidly to its timeline of ending the EU transition period in December 2020; recognises that this significantly increases the risk of a no-deal exit; further recognises that it will be impossible for the vast majority of businesses and communities to prepare for life outside the single market and customs union while coping with the effect of the covid-19 pandemic at the same time; notes that the devolved Governments did not give their consent to the Government's EU Withdrawal Agreement legislation; concludes that the only realistic and reasonable approach is for the Government to revise its timeline for negotiation; further notes that Article 132 of the Withdrawal Agreement contains provisions for the UK-EU Joint Committee to adopt a single decision extending the transition for up to one or two years; calls on the Government to request a two-year extension to the transition period.

[EU exit transition period](#)

EDM 343 (session 2019-21)

Claire Hanna

21 April 2020

That this House notes with disappointment the announcement on 16 April 2020 by the UK's chief Brexit negotiator that the UK Government intends to refuse to extend the EU exit transition period beyond December 2020, risking a no-deal Brexit during a time that the UK, Europe and much of the world will be trying to recover from the public health and economic shock of Covid-19; recognises that the design and delivery of an entirely new arrangement between the UK and the EU will be extremely challenging in the midst of the current crisis; notes that coming out of the transition period without a trade deal during this time when there is already concern around supply of food, medicine and essential equipment could further disrupt vital supply chains; recognises the particular damaging impact this would have on Northern Ireland, risking disruption of all-island co-operation; and calls on the Government to request a two-year extension to the EU exit transition period.

Covid-19 pandemic and EU negotiations

EDM 294 (session 2019-21)

Hywel Williams

13 March 2020

That this House urges the UK Government to immediately request an extension to the transition period and to suspend negotiations with the EU until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides; notes that Article 132 of the Withdrawal Agreement contains provisions for the UK-EU Joint Committee to adopt a single decision extending the transition for up to 1 or 2 years; believes that public health professionals' advice for self-isolation will inevitably reduce the capacity of the Civil Service to negotiate a future agreement as well as its ability to replace European frameworks and agencies; recalls that the Prime Minister said in a statement on 12 March that there will be severe disruption across our country for many months; calls on the Government to minimise uncertainty for people and businesses during the outbreak; and further calls on the UK Government to work closely with other European governments in responding to the pandemic.

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