

## The State of EU-UK Diplomatic Relations

09:30 - 12:00

Thursday 16th September 2021

Chaired by Co-Convenor of the Commission: Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

**Apologies:** Andrew Ballheimer; Dr Philippa Whitford MP; Professor Shearer West; Stephen Farry MP

### AGENDA

#### CLOSED Session 9.30am-10.00am [30 MINS] - Commissioners Only

1. Approval of Minutes and Transcript from Research Session (22nd July)
2. Approval of Minutes and Transcript from Logistics Session (2nd September)
3. Approval of the Interim Report
4. Verbal Update on the Meeting with Minister Stuart

#### **Minutes**

The Chair welcomed everybody to the session after the Summer Recess, before then asking Commissioners to approve the Minutes and Transcript for previous sessions. Both sets of Minutes and Transcripts were approved.

The next item on the agenda was the Interim Report of the Commission, which was approved by Commissioners.

Following this, the Chair ran through operational points ahead of the session.

Naomi Smith then gave gratitude to all Commissioners for their hard work since April, and the Closed Session was concluded.

#### **Live Evidence Session 10:00am - 12:00pm [120 MINS] - Commissioners and Witnesses**

1. Q & A

16 September 2021

**Hilary Benn MP**

Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the UK Trade and Business Commission. Today's session is looking at the state of relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union and the negotiations that are taking place and the politics and we are really grateful to our witnesses this morning for making the time available to give us the benefit of their knowledge and expertise. This should be a really, really good session. I wonder if I could just begin by asking our witnesses to introduce themselves for the record, just looking in order that you are appearing, starting with you Nathalie.

**Nathalie Loiseau**

Yes, thank you all of you from both sides of the Channel, my name is Nathalie Loiseau, I'm a French member of the European Parliament, a previous minister for European affairs in the Macron Government. A dedicated Anglophile which is not always as popular as it used to be and so working in the UK contact group of the European Parliament monitoring everything Brexit related.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Well, you're most welcome and it's really good to see you today. Next Terry.

**Terry Reintke**

Thanks a lot Hilary and thanks a lot for the invitation. My name is Terry Reintke, I'm a Green member of the European Parliament elected in Germany and I am also a dedicated Anglophile, just like Nathalie and I am one of the co-founders together with Nathalie of the UK Friendship Group in European Parliament and now also appointed already to be a member of the UK delegation in the European Parliament.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Thank you very much indeed. Georgina.

**Georgina Wright**

Thank you very much Commissioner and thank you to everyone who is listening in. My name is Georgina Wright, I'm the Head of the Europe Programme at the French think-tank [inaudible 0:02:53.1] in Paris where I sort of look at the EU very closely, I'm British but I am a Francophile, so I'm very much looking forward to this session.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Thank you very much indeed Georgina. And last but by no means least Peter.

#### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

Another Brit and another Francophile, I'm an unelected member of Parliament in the House of Lords. I'm a 40-year diplomat and my last posting was as Ambassador in Paris and I've been involved in EU affairs throughout my career.

#### **Hilary Benn MP**

Well, you're all very welcome. Can I just say for those who are watching, Terry will have to leave us at some point in the session because of other commitments and we will, we're expecting to be joined at about 11 o'clock by Ambassador Almeida who is the European Union Ambassador to the United Kingdom. Can I just say to our commissioners and to witnesses, as ever we have a lot of ground to cover in the time available so succinct questions and succinct answers would be much appreciated. We have to finish by midday and we've got a lot of things to discuss and with that introduction, can I turn to Alison Williams who is going to put the first question. Alison, over to you.

#### **Alison Williams**

Thank you and yeah thank you to all the witnesses and experts joining us today. So as an opening question we want to get a sense of where the relations are between the EU and the UK now that Brexit is a reality, so it would be great to hear from each of you on how you would describe the relations between those two and what you think, what the thinking is around the EU about the UK now that Brexit has happened. So, if we could start with Nathalie that would be great.

#### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well thank you for giving me the floor. Well the UK left the European Union but didn't leave Europe and, or the reasons for having strong relations between the UK and the EU are obvious, we have common interests, we are facing the same challenges and we have so many partnerships and relations that we have to preserve. But I would not say that the current situation for relations is satisfactory. Despite the trade and cooperation agreement which was signed and ratified on both sides we are still lacking some political momentum to improve or preserve our partnerships. I would of course insist on the fact that we have no structured partnership on foreign policy and defence at the moment where it's obvious that we should work more together facing the same challenges, just to begin with what took place in Afghanistan and the consequences which are dire for all of us. And on other topics as well I think this should be better, but my feeling and I'm very sincere because I'm a true friend and true friends speak their mind, are there is still too much ideology and the word Brexit is still used too often.

As regards to where the European Union views things, yesterday there was the State of the Union address by Ursula von der Leyen in the European Parliament, a big moment of European democracy where we take stock of what took place last year and try to discuss what we want to do in the coming year and a number of my British friends were struck and shocked because they didn't hear the word Brexit and they didn't hear the word United Kingdom. Well, that's a signal that the EU is moving forward, is not Brexit obsessed and is not obsessed by blaming our partner for things that go right or for things that go wrong. And I think that we have to acknowledge this. I think we should try

to normalise our discussions and get out of some sort of hysteria that took place and that is still sometimes at least in British media and is not helpful to fix problems and move forward.

### **Alison Williams**

Thank you, that's ... yeah that's really interesting observations about the emotion attached to it all. OK can we move onto Terry please?

### **Terry Reintke**

Sure, thanks a lot. I mean maybe first of all I generally agree with what Nathalie has been saying, I think the relationship has been deteriorating. If I look back a little bit, like my childhood growing up in Germany, I think the UK was always seen as one of our strongest allies and that there is a lot of you know rationality in British politics and I think that that image has really shifted over the past, maybe as an anecdote also from my own experience when I talk to people who are not in politics, who are not so close, you know with the development and I think that on a diplomatic level, on a political level, a lot of trust has been broken. I think there was in the past years very often, if I want to maybe see what the UK Government, what role the UK Government played misrepresentation of some of the issues that the European Union was bringing forward, I mean now the recent development regarding the Northern Ireland protocol are certainly not always helpful as well. But I would also like to criticise the European side because maybe there I have a little bit of different view than Nathalie, I was also very disappointed that Ursula von der Leyen did not mention the UK at all in the State of the Union, because I actually believe that it's a wrong move to turn away now from you know mentioning the UK and working on the relations, because if we have this analysis that trust has been broken I think our aim should be to rebuild this trust. Because when we look at the TCA, I mean it is certainly not what we wanted from the side of the European Parliament, not in terms of the scope that it has, Nathalie was mentioning foreign relations but there are also other issues that are not integrated in this agreement. But also there are a lot of issues that will be very challenging to actually put into reality. I mean when you look at this rebalancing mechanism it is something that is completely new in a trade agreement and we will need a trusting relationship to make that work. And this is why I would actually like also from the European side to have more investment into rebuilding these relations, obviously also from the UK side, and I hope that we can use also in the next month the opportunities that we will have, also travelling more, there will be the COP in the UK in the end of the year, to actually have platforms again and we can have these exchanges because I think that they are really lacking at the moment. Thank you.

### **Alison Williams**

Thank you, that's a really powerful statement, the idea of the trust being broken and I think absolutely right around the, as we go forward how do we build that up again through travel and more connection. Thank you. Can I go to Lord Ricketts please?

### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

Thank you very much. I think those were two very powerful statements by good friends of Britain in Europe that we ought to listen to here and it feels to me the same way sitting in London but staying in touch with friends around Europe, I think the mood is distrustful, I think it's transactional now, I think rather than seeing the UK as a partner it's seen as a problem to be managed, where people think about it at all. And Terry is kind to say that the EU should pay more attention to the UK but my

own feeling is that the UK has become much, much less relevant to the central preoccupations of the EU now as set out in von der Leyen's speech, and for the UK it is ideological, I think that's right. I think there has been a hope, aspiration that by working on improving relations individually with France and Germany and one or two other member states that we can replicate what we had in some areas of the EU, I don't think that's going to work. I think although France and Germany will of course work with us in some areas, their first loyalty will always be to the EU and it is not a strategy that can work to try and build bilateral relations while the relationship with the EU is dysfunctional. So I, of course, completely agree that we should get back to rebuilding cooperation, starting in foreign affairs, it doesn't feel to me like the British Government is at all in the mode of looking to rebuild, at the moment it's treating the EU as a convenient scapegoat for many of the other problems in the country and not really looking for constructive solutions even on Northern Ireland. So, the time will come I'm absolutely sure for rebuilding, I fear it may not be while this particular Cabinet of politicians is in power.

**Alison Williams**

Thank you Lord Ricketts, yeah a worrying prognosis but I think it sounds very insightful and accurate. Can I move onto Georgina please?

**Georgina Wright**

Thank you Alison, I mean I fully agree with everything that's been said so I'll be very brief. I think relations aren't good but that's not entirely a surprise and I will say that I think a period of mourning was always going to be necessary after such, you know, politicised and political negotiations. I think sitting in Paris at least some of the surprise is around the UK's confrontational tone, I'm not sure that's helping to kind of rebuild that trust that is so essential, and I think we'll come back to it throughout the session. But I think also the important thing to note is the EU and the EU27 have kind of moved on from Brexit, you know in fact many people have moved on from the negotiations long before they actually ended and you know they want to think about the new chapter, but I think Lord Ricketts is right, you know the EU does pay less attention to its neighbours than it does its own members and in terms of third countries, you know there's the US and China and then there's the rest. So actually you know it's going to be essential to have that trust but also the UK is going to have to work a lot harder to be listened to.

**Alison Williams**

It sounds like our position has really fundamentally changed. Thank you, I'll pass back.

**Hilary Benn MP**

OK, Alison thank you very much indeed and thanks for those opening assessments. Right, I'm next going to turn to Tamara Cincik, Tamara.

**Tamara Cincik**

Thank you. My question is, looking back over the period since 2016, how would you characterise the UK approach to the negotiations, how effective was it in delivering its objectives? And I'll start with you if I may Lord Ricketts please.

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

Well we could spend all day on this but of course we do need to spend most of our time looking forward I think rather than back but just briefly to look back, my own assessment is that Theresa May missed an enormously important opportunity when she came into power after the referendum to pause the process, she was the master of the timetable at that point. She could have said I need a year to work out what the referendum means, what people want, to have some sort of national commission or something which would have at least hammered out some basic principles for our negotiators to pursue. And she didn't do that, she rushed into triggering Article 50 and the two-year timetable before we had any sense really of whether there was any degree of national agreement on what the future relationship with the EU should be. And therefore, British negotiators who I think Nathalie and Terry would agree, are normally well prepared, have a good brief and you know, know what they're after, didn't really know what they were after. They had the Prime Minister's red lines but no more than that. And so I think honestly the British side played a poor hand in the negotiations because it didn't really know what it wanted, Theresa May never had a Parliamentary majority or any positive, Parliament knew what it didn't want but didn't know what it did want. And that is where trust began to leech away I think, as the EU side had to essentially work out from the UK's red lines what kind of a future relationship was going to be possible having first of all secured their interests in the withdrawal agreement. So no, I mean I don't think Theresa May had any clear objectives and therefore she didn't achieve them.

When Boris Johnson came in and this is my last point, he did have one clear objective which was to get Britain out of the EU and to re-establish what he called 'sovereignty' which is a pretty slippery term really, but nominal sovereignty, taking back control, and he achieved that and the EU achieved their objective at that point which was to protect the integrity of the single market and the EU came out massively a loser from that bargain.

**Tamara Cincik**

So I think you drew on something that was in my head when I was asking the question is that I think the UK was very clear on what it didn't want and less clear on what it did want and do you think that had we had this commission, although you would have had voices saying that you're delaying Brexit, that's not what we asked for, do you think it would have been a point where we could have unified the vision?

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

Theresa May had great power at that point, I mean they had just replaced in the Conservative Party David Cameron, she was not about to be replaced immediately either, she could have called the shots and she could have at least got people to work out what kind of a deal did Britain want. I think at that point actually even the Leave campaign would have settled for a close, you know constructive relationship with the EU, closer than we are now with the single market and the customs union, avoiding a lot of the problems that we've had, if that had been crystallised it would have taken time, but you know in the past sometimes this country has come together to set out some objectives and I think that was a real opportunity missed.

**Tamara Cincik**

That's a very interesting point, I think that's a very valid point as well remembering from my industry as well the fall-out of the confusion around trade and all the red tape, I agree with you on that, I think it's a missed opportunity.

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

I don't think that was intended by many people when they voted Leave, for perfect honourable reasons but they didn't expect that outcome I don't think.

**Tamara Cincik**

No, I agree, it was probably an unforeseen consequence of that. Thank you for that Lord Ricketts. Georgina Wright if I may ask you the same question, would you like me to repeat the question or have you got it written down?

**Georgina Wright**

No, was it how looking back how ...

**Tamara Cincik**

Yes, yes.

**Georgina Wright**

So I think that's a really good question and I completely agree with Lord Ricketts. I mean I think to start off with maybe credit where it's due, I mean it was a huge, it is an extraordinary achievement that the UK and EU were able to negotiate you know the TCA in under 11 months during a global pandemic and you know if you look at sort of typically EU trade negotiations they take between a year and a half and seven years to conclude and this was much more than a simple trade agreement and it was by no means a foregone conclusion as we know it was touch and go several times. It was you know in the public debate all the time, usually trade negotiations aren't that politicised throughout and also a closer look at the actual agreement shows that both sides did move from their original mandate, so I think you know credit where it's due and credit to our negotiators on both sides.

But, to sort of complete what Lord Ricketts was saying, I think there was a problem at the very start where the UK knew exactly what it didn't want but not quite what it wanted but it didn't, it also didn't really know how it was going to approach this negotiation and I've written about this before and I have received pushback and obviously I was not sat in, you know I wasn't in the room so I don't really know exactly how it unfolded, but I think the UK Government was slow to realise that negotiating as a big member state inside the EU is a radically different experience to negotiating as a third country with the EU, so when you're a big member state you essentially call the shots, you say loudly and clearly if you agree with the Commission proposal and if you don't, and if you don't you then call up member states you think are likely to share your point of view and you try and block in in

Council. All of a sudden the UK was in a position where it couldn't do that because it was on the other side of the table, so the initial tactic of you know trying to do it bilaterally with individual member states, I mean it was very important to put forward the British position and to make sure that EU capitals understood it, but fundamentally this negotiation was going to be done the same way as all EU trade negotiations are done which is the Commission, you know negotiating on behalf of the 27 member states and of course the other institutions, and I think that was, that sort of change in dynamic you know the fact that the EU was so united, I mean I wasn't surprised at all by that, I thought the EU is going to approach it the same way it does all negotiations, you know appoint a very good team, make sure that you update regularly the member states but also the European Parliament and then of course Michel Barnier as the lead negotiator went out of his way to talk to national parliaments and trade association groups and NGOs and all sorts. So I think the, you know slow to understand that that was different. And then of course there was some points in the negotiation, I'm thinking of the Chequer's Agreement in 2018, I'm thinking about you know the very early on in the negotiations saying well the UK is going to significantly diverge, that was obviously going to mean that the EU was going to be much more adamant about finding some way of managing that divergence going forward, and so it shifted away from the opportunities of market access to protection and making sure that we abide by similar rules. So, but again I think let's not forget that it is an extraordinary achievement.

#### **Tamara Cincik**

Thank you. Thank you for that. I'm aware of time so I'm just going to ask Nathalie, I mean of course the one point to add is of course the UK population weren't united behind that which I think draws on Lord Ricketts' idea of a commission and a unified united vision of what Brexit would have been and I'm just bringing that thought into the question as well and your thoughts on this question.

#### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well thank you. First of all I would like to go in the same direction as Peter Ricketts. The British Prime Minister be it Theresa May or Boris Johnson were the masters of time for this negotiation and it was surprisingly bumpy. There was a lot of stop and go. Many time lost, many time wasted where we could have discussions at a technical level and nothing was taking place. Refusal by Boris Johnson to extend the transition period when we see today that checks will not be in place simply because they are not ready.

I'm not criticising this, it's a huge undertaking for the British authorities. Everybody would have understood that it would have required more time, but it was rejected on ideological basis. As you said, a number of red lines and very few green lines, it was very difficult to say OK we take stock of progress and then we'll see the difficulties at the end of the day. It was more we have difficulties and we are not working out progress.

On the political landscape, yes that was a huge difficulty for us, we all became experts on the British political landscape and it was quite surprising I have to say. On the Tory side we heard much more about the DUP than about the position of the Tory Party. On the Labour side, sorry old friends, but at the time when Jeremy Corbyn was leading the Labour he seemed to pay no attention to Brexit, we were paying more attention to Brexit than some of the British political leaders and as regards our LibDem friends they were still trying to think that the most important was to erase the results of the referendum. So that was very difficult for us to deal with. But I have to blame ourselves because we were so silent before the referendum, we were not even proud of what we were able to do within the European Union, we didn't sell it to our British friends and that is our mistake to my view.



**Tamara Cincik**

Thank you very much.

**Hilary Benn MP**

OK. Thank you. Right we are going to have to move on because time is very tight. Paul Blomfield.

**Paul Blomfield MP**

Thanks very much Hilary. I wonder if I can pick up on a point that Georgina made about confrontational tone and clearly the UK Government have been suggesting at flashpoints subsequent to the deal that the EU needs to show more flexibility. I wonder how far our panellists think that's a reasonable criticism or is it a matter of the UK not understanding its position as a third country or having expectations of the EU that were never going to be delivered, and I wonder if I could start with Terry.

**Terry Reintke**

Thanks a lot and yeah I think maybe we talk now about how the UK approached the negotiations, I think if we look at the picture on the EU side it was basically the opposite because we had a very united council, so the member states were all really united, we had a European Parliament that set out a very clear vision of how we want this to work and what we want out of this and I think this was obviously then setting a frame for the European Commission who were also much better prepared in a way for these negotiations and this is also why then the proposals that were coming from the European side were basically becoming the draft that all the negotiations were happening on. And I think that this call for flexibility again and again, I don't fully buy it because when I look back now, I mean if I look at the situation with the Northern Ireland protocol for example, for me there are only two options, either the UK side in the negotiations really didn't fully understand what they were signing up to, or honestly they were signing up to something that they never really intended of implementing in the end. And I think that obviously I hope it's the first part of the options, but I think that this was the situation for them because in the campaign things had been promised from all sides what would happen and all the things that the UK would get that these promises they could never be kept because they were so unrealistic and so out of the, what was in the reality, what was realistically possible in this negotiations that I think they were basically starting from a position where they could only fail in way. And I think that right now the UK Government from my perspective is still trying to defend this and I think that the much better strategy would be to acknowledge this, you know that there was a starting point from which things would get really difficult because what was promised could never be kept in the end and I think that for the actual implementation of what we have now in terms of the withdrawal agreement, but also in terms of the TCA now becoming real and saying look this is what we have and we tried to make it work, I think this would be the first step, not only to then implement this agreement but also to rebuild the trust that we spoke about in the beginning and the we need to build a relationship that is then sustainable and fit for the future.

**Paul Blomfield MP**

OK thanks, so there's a need for, you would see it as honesty on the UK side. Nathalie, how do you see that?

**Nathalie Loiseau**

Well, I think first of all flexibility from the European Union is difficult to ask for because we have to build a position with converging views from 27 member states and different political groups in the European Parliament and even different sides within the Commission. At the moment we have a position which is quite difficult to change it. But we were pragmatic, that's the first time in my life, I was a former career diplomat, where pragmatism was on the EU side and ideology on the British side. Usually it was the other way around. And as the UK was still betting on divide and rule, and it didn't work, it was very difficult to move on. But even now, we are putting proposals on flexibilities around the Northern Ireland protocol. We are trying to start from the needs of people in Northern Ireland and trying to address these needs and be as pragmatic as possible, but still we have an agreement, everybody knows it by heart and the negotiators in London are the same who are in power now and they are not talking about flexibilities, they are talking about redrafting an international agreement and a commitment, and of course we are as the EU believe in an international rules based order, and we believe that it was the case of the UK, so it's extremely troubling and not completely helpful.

**Paul Blomfield MP**

Thanks very much, I'd love to pursue that with others, but I think time forces me to return to Hilary now.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Paul thank you very much indeed for that. Right, next to Geoff Mackey, Geoff.

**Geoff Mackey**

Thank you very much Chairman. Good morning. For those of us in business, negotiation is very much part of what we take as the rhythm of life, however it would appear the negotiating issues have always been divided into those that seem as difficult, such as data adequacy or agriculture and those where cooperation is obvious such as security. I just wondered, would you like to comment on that as a perception, is that right and how does that match the view in Brussels? Could we start with Terry please?

**Terry Reintke**

Actually when I read the question I was a little bit surprised that you put the question of security into something that is easy because I had the feeling that even in the field that like were related to security there were a lot of potential, there was a lot of potential friction and I think that this was due to the fact that if we take, if we would have taken this out of the political context it would in a lot of things, because it just make sense to cooperate on a lot of issues, would have been much, much

easier. But because the debate was so heated up and it was so much on like am I winning something, can we you know stick it to the EU if you want to call it that, that made a lot of things much more difficult. And I would still say, I mean I agree with Georgina, it's good that we have a deal now for the future relations, at the same time I don't think this is a good deal, I don't think it is complete and I think in a lot of areas we would still really have to see how we can make this a reality. We would still have to see how we can actually implement it in reality and I think for example if there had been more time and if the context in which it was negotiated wouldn't have been as heated, many more pragmatic solutions could have been found to certain questions. Also the more controversial ones, so I still believe that this deal is not going to be the last word, Brexit is definitely not done, there is still a lot of open questions and we will have to continue to see how we can solve them.

### **Geoff Mackey**

Thanks Terry, Lord Ricketts, am I being very, very naïve?

### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

No, not at all and just to underline what Terry said, we're going to be negotiating between the EU and the UK till the end of time. Or till, you know, till everything changes. So it's certainly not done, no. I mean I think all the issues were difficult actually, for the reason that Georgina gives, separating the EU and the UK after 40 years together was always going to be difficult across the board. Some issues were difficult not because of their intrinsic importance economically, but because of the politics behind them and fish, I think and perhaps Northern Ireland are the two obvious examples of that. And of course they're interconnected. You mentioned data adequacy and security, of course if the UK fails to convince the EU to maintain a data adequacy agreement it will have an impact as well on the security relationship.

I think an area that came out well actually and just a nuance on Terry's point, was the internal security, justice and home affairs area, part three of the trade and cooperation agreement, where actually there's a very large amount of continuity and I was agreeably surprised by what the two sides achieved there, with the exception of Britain's exclusion from the Schengen information system, SIS2, which I think is a problem. And an area which should have been easy, foreign policy cooperation, where we have lots of shared interests, turned out to be impossible as somebody said, for ideological reasons on the UK's side. So, I'm not sure that the amount of agreement reached necessarily reflects the intrinsic difficulty of each issue, a lot of it was around the politics on both sides and the ideological blocks in certain cases in the UK side.

### **Geoff Mackey**

Thank you very much. Nathalie we just need to keep on talking and talk more, how does that sit with the conversation?

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well yes, it's not the end of the story but I agree with Peter Ricketts and Terry, things that should have been easy are not done. As mentioned, Erasmus, it was one of the bad surprises of the negotiation, we never thought that the UK would shoot itself in the foot because it's basically going against soft power from the UK. Agricultural or at least sanitary regulations, if I talk to stakeholders in the UK, producers, farmers or consumers, they all want the same level of regulation which they

had when the UK was a member state. So how come that it became difficult if not for political reasons? That's the same with fisheries, fish is British, fishermen are Europeans and the market is indeed European Union, that's a fact, that's a given, it has been the fact even before the UK was a member state. Why are we creating problems where there could be solutions? This is ideological. And we are living on problems instead of trying to find solutions. I hope it will change, it's an on-going discussion. The problem now is again for stakeholders, the absence of visibility, even on those adequacies, a number of other prominent sectors, and yes indeed the good surprise, the magical surprise was that we were not in the room on both sides on justice and home affairs, where indeed it's a matter of sovereignty but what is at stake is so important that we were able to overcome our divergences.

**Geoff Mackey**

Thank you Nathalie, Georgina just to complete my question if I may, ideology over pragmatism.

**Georgina Wright**

I mean, you know I guess it depends who you talk to on what side and at what point in the negotiations. I mean you know I know that there was quite a lot of frustration on the British side that the EU kept on insisting that everything was a package, so nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. I think there were, you know some people on the British side who thought well let's try and make as much progress as we can on those issues where we do see eye-to-eye, but of course on the EU side there was a fear that if we did that, we'd run out of time for all those issues where there were real divergences and differences. So again, I think the approach to this negotiation was different and I think that was going to be very difficult to reconcile given like what Lord Ricketts said, but also Terry and Nathalie, that the politics of it made it very difficult. So I would say it's helpful to try and move beyond the ideology and the pragmatism and I remember talking to a lot of contacts in the EU throughout the negotiations, they said you know the UK used to be so pragmatic and I said was it pragmatic or was it just very easy and very good at adapting quickly to new situations, so I think we need to move with that, the ability to adapt and try and use that as a basis for building trust rather than this hope that somehow there's pragmatism or vice-versa an emphasis on ideology.

**Geoff Mackey**

Thank you very much, thank you Chair.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Geoff, thanks very much indeed. Caroline Lucas.

**Caroline Lucas MP**

Thank you very much Chair and it's lovely to welcome our witnesses and in particular my Green colleague Terry, so great to see you. I must say it's incredibly painful to relive all of these wasted opportunities and so forth, but on that subject if I might come back to Lord Ricketts and pick up where you left off Lord Ricketts on question two when you said we kind of played our hand pretty poorly. Did the UK make full use of the different diplomatic approaches after 2016, I'm thinking of things like you know using our wider networks, our diplomatic posts, our elected politicians and in

particular has our approach of a lead negotiator working directly to the PM been effective or was that not such a great idea?

### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

It's a very interesting set of questions and I think it bears on the negotiating style of the two sides which has already been touched on. I think Georgina said that Michel Barnier was very open, I mean first of all his mandate was published and clear, he reported frequently to the Council, he reported to the European Parliament on what was going on and Theresa May, partly because of her very weak position within her own party was very, very secretive and actually what was happening in the negotiations, what the British were actually saying was a closely guarded secret, so much so that I think the European Parliament were better informed about the British position in the negotiations than the British Parliament was. And therefore I think that British diplomats around Europe were also handicapped. Normally as you say we would be getting our Embassies in the capitals lobbying, opinion formers, parliamentarians, all round the place. I'm not sure that they were cut into actually what the negotiating strategy was, except in the most broad terms, in terms of Prime Minister's public statements. So, I mean there was a degree of effort to pick off individual countries to divide and rule as Nathalie said, but I don't think it was very effective, I don't think it was going to work anyway. But I think there's a real reflection to be done on the British side about the style of negotiation, because the secretiveness I think weakened our capacity to lobby for our cause and the structure set-up I think was pretty dysfunctional actually. I think to create a new department, DExEu, separate from the Foreign Office at very short notice, guaranteed friction and then to have a Minister and also a senior official who was sort of double-hatted as leading it, David Davies and then Dominic Raab and then a senior official as Ollie Robbins was most of the time, I think left the European partners confused as to who actually was doing the negotiating, who was licensed to put forward proposals.

Always before Whitehall has worked very well with a very senior Europe official advising the Prime Minister sitting in the Cabinet Office and there's been a great succession of those and then with Ministers deciding the policy in Cabinet or a Cabinet Committee. And that kind of command structure broke down because of the secretiveness and because of the rather weird departmental structure and I'm not sure that the Minister and senior civil servant combination ever worked, it was better finally when there was one senior official reporting to the Prime Minister, but I do think the British side ought to reflect on what I think was a more effective negotiating style adopted in the EU, I think by necessity because nothing ever stays secret in the EU, but I think they turned it to advantage.

### **Caroline Lucas MP**

Thank you. Could I ask Nathalie what it felt like from your perspective please?

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well I fully agree that the Barnier's method being completely transparent made a whole difference, because he was not only talking to Government and to the Parliament but also to national Parliaments, to trade unions, to businesses and I can testify how often British stakeholders would come to me to try to know what was the British position, it was really weird. And they were seemingly not really listened to because what they were pushing for was exactly the European position, that's the first thing. Second, I have to admit and acknowledge that when you become a third state having been a member state for years and decades, you have lost part of the

competences, if God forbid, France was to leave the European Union we don't know how to negotiate trade agreements because this is a competence of the European Union, which would hire hundreds of experts to do the job and that was what the UK was facing. And of course for us, for the European Union it was easier to reach out to our stakeholders because what we were saying is well, guys, Brexit is taking place, no time for nostalgia, we are trying to mitigate negative consequences of the decision and on the British side it was impossible to even admit that there would be negative consequences of the decision to mitigate. So, I think this was the reason for the secret.

But what strikes me, and not to put the blame on the UK because I always try to think how it could happen to my home country or other European countries, the UK has the best and brightest diplomats around the World, and I mean it, I'm sure that even when they were selling ideological talking points to us they were also reporting on answers, what was made of these reports because all too often I would meet with Theresa May or Boris Johnson or David Davies or Dominic Raab and they seemed not to be aware of the difficulties ahead, not to be informed or not to be really involved in all the technicalities which were part of the negotiation, so all this knowledge, competence from the British Diplomatic Service was not really used to the benefit of the negotiation. This is my question.

**Caroline Lucas MP**

Thank you.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Now Caroline, I'm just conscious that Terry has to leave us shortly and I know that Layla wants to put a point about the potential impact of the German elections. What time ... how soon do you have to leave Terry?

**Terry Reintke**

I still have five minutes I guess.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Five minutes, so I'm just anxious that we ...

**Caroline Lucas MP**

I'll pass over to Layla, that's fine.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Is that alright, thank you so much. Layla, would you like to come in, Layla Moran.

**Layla Moran MP**

Thank you so much, thank you Terry for your spare five minutes, I'll come to you first. So obviously we've got the German elections concluding very soon and of course we've got the French presidency

coming up and also the presidential elections, but from your perspective I wanted to know has the UK been mentioned at all in the course of the election campaign, is it featuring or are we now just absolutely not on the agenda, and sort of second to that, and we can't obviously predict the outcome other than it will be different to what was before, but what's your best view of how EU-UK relations might change as a result of the result of your election Terry?

### **Terry Reintke**

Well I think a little bit also reflecting on what Ursula von der Leyen said in the State of the Union, I can tell you that the UK and Brexit was not really one of the main topics in the German election campaign. What however was a topic is obviously the future of the European Union because I mean we can talk a lot about how the negotiations went but I think we also have to look at how do we actually want to build a European Union in the future, reflecting also on what happened with Brexit now and I think that they are in I think a good position that we have three candidates for the Chancellery that, I mean I obviously have a preference who is the best of them, but they are all very pro-European, so I think that they are definitely going to want to build a Government that then is going to see where we can have better integration and what we can do to make the European Union stronger. I also think that they are all very open to what's strong UK relations and I mean you could already see that now the trade relations between Germany and the UK, which I think from an economic point were also always very important for Germany deteriorating, also the political relations as we have spoken of, the trust that has been broken, so I hope that no matter what the outcome in terms of the Chancellery is going to be that we will have a German government that is going to invest in this, however I can really see that the challenge for me to keep it on the agenda and to really also constantly remind not only the people in Brussels, not only the Commission, not only in the European Parliament but also the Governments of the members states, how important it is to continue to invest into the relations with the UK and not only to look at the US and China because I still believe that the UK is a very close partner and you know things can also change in the next 10, 15, 20 years again and then maybe we are going to look at an even closer relationship again, so I think that they are all on the right track in terms of what they want for the UK, but I think keeping it in the minds of people and you know talking about how we can build a sustainable relationship in the future that will be something that we altogether have to work on. And I'm sorry I have to leave now, I still wish you have a wonderful debate, bye-bye and I'll see you all in the UK or in Brussels at some point, that would be fantastic.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

Terry thank you very much for joining us today, all the best. Now Layla.

### **Layla Moran MP**

Could I ask the same question of Nathalie but from the French perspective of the French presidency and also the French elections which are further away of course but already gearing up.

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well, I have to say that in France right now it's a pre-electoral campaign, many things are debated, not the UK and not Brexit. Finally we managed to realise that Brexit has taken place and that we are moving forward, and I think it's good because when it becomes an electoral issue you have more polemics then, rational debate. Of course if Marine Le Pen was to win the election first that would

be a tragedy for France and for Europe, she would probably be in trouble because she was a strong Brexiteer, she applauded to the success of the Brexit Party, at some point you even wondered whether she was defending the interests of the French nationals or simply an ideology that she likes, but when you come to power you have to defend the interests of your fellow citizens and this is what brought us together from the Polish peace to Koshta [ph 0:49:39.5] in Portugal, we may have very different political views throughout Europe, Salvini [ph 0:49:47.8] in Italy, when he was in power never broke the unity of the 27 as regards Brexit because the basis of our position in the negotiation was protecting our citizens, protecting our businesses, protecting the single market, freedom of movement, things that are really basics and that are debated by no one.

### **Layla Moran MP**

Thank you very much. Georgina do you want to add anything on either of those upcoming events? Or indeed the French presidency of the Council is the other factor that's coming in isn't it in January.

### **Georgina Wright**

Yeah, I mean very, very quickly, I think there are two aspects here there's the process and the politics. The process is when it comes to Brexit, or post-Brexit reality, you know France's view is very much that's led by the European Commission and the EU Commission's team that are dealing, be that for the Northern Ireland protocol or the sort of people involved in overseeing the TCA, have the full backing of France and if they feel that that's, you know that the EU Commission is doing something that they don't agree with they'll say that, but they're very happy to let the Commission lead on that, so that's a process point.

On the politics point, I mean you know Brexit was important but it was never a priority for France and the EU and I really think that's important to underline and that was the case during the negotiations as well, because there's a lot going on in the EU and if you look at the upcoming French presidency I've rarely seen as many EU big pieces of legislation being debated at the same time, so you've got the green deal, you've got this global compass which is the you know potential white book outlining the new foreign policy, you've got digital services act, digital markets act, I mean these are huge and substantial pieces of legislation that are being debated at the same time and that's where the focus is and that's where the focus will be during the French presidency. And then finally you know to kind of you know complete what Nathalie was saying, I think the ... you know foreign policy rarely figures in political campaigns and you've seen it in Germany, the EU hasn't really figured that prominently, with Macron it's a bit different because obviously he made the EU a centre pillar of his you know domestic and foreign policy, but of course that's why when the UK continues to talk about the EU through the Brexit prism, that's not necessarily, it doesn't really help France kind of engaging on UK-EU relations, they're just thinking, as I think Lord Ricketts said at the start, it's a problem at the moment, we'll just park it.

So, I think you know the bilateral track will continue on defence and stuff like that but anything to do with UK-EU relations, let's let the Commission deal with that.

### **Layla Moran MP**

Thank you very much. Yes, I'll pass back to Chair.



**Hilary Benn MP**

Layla thank you very ... OK thank you very much indeed. Liz Saville-Roberts. Liz.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP**

Thank you very much Chair. My general question is asking about the pathway to better relations but because time is short and if you will forgive me, I'm going to go straight into two specific questions in relation to this. Now my first question because I represent a constituency in Wales is about the role of the devolved governments in future, given that we've talked about the tensions that presently exist between the UK Government and the EU per se. The devolved governments have representatives in Brussels, they have them in other cities across EU countries, but I mean specifically for Wales our experience has been difficulties with Erasmus, difficulties with border checks towards Ireland, what role do you think the devolved Governments might play in future, and Nathalie if I could start with you please.

**Nathalie Loiseau**

Well we meet quite often with representatives of devolved governments in Brussels and I think it's helpful to get a full picture of what's taking place in the UK and not only in London. I think what we have to do is go to the United Kingdom, first of all go to Northern Ireland and I really praise Maros Sefcovic for having been there in the last days, but we have to do it much more and as member of the European Parliament this is also our role. To continue the conversation and not let it be hijacked by ideology, to try to find solution, to get a proper sense of what we can build on, ideas and proposals that we put on the table. At the moment where there is still too much blame game against the EU in the United Kingdom and there are people throughout the United Kingdom who need to know that the EU can provide, for instance I am struck that on the Northern Ireland protocol issue very few people say that today Northern Ireland has its cake and eats it, it is in the UK single market and it is in the EU single market, that's a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland. Who says that on the British side? Not many people. I think it's our role to tell them wow, after all you're not the victims of the whole thing, you can become the winners.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP**

Thank you and Georgina do you have anything to comment, I mean particularly again possibly Northern Ireland is in a particular situation, Scotland and Wales are in another situation and speaking as a Europhile I think generally speaking that our Parliaments and our Governments might well speak in a different way to the UK Government.

**Georgina Wright**

Thank you very much, I would point to a report that I wrote in my previous life when I was at the Institute for Government I wrote a report called 'Influencing the EU after Brexit' and we very much called on kind of the devolved administrations maintaining their links with the EU and that actually that was part of the team UK approach. Of course the difficulty is for some areas of competency the British Government is the right interlocutor, for others it will be the devolved and the British governments, but I think I would encourage the devolved governments, but also you know the Assemblies and Parliaments to really participate in EU-wide you know Parliamentary conferences, to have as many links as possible, it's important to maintain those and it's good to have as many

personal relationships as possible, especially I think if you feel that the UK position or the devolved position isn't as understood as it should be in the EU.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP**

Thank you very much. My second question and again if I could start with Nathalie, your experience of the capacity and capability of UK non-Government organisations, so this could be farming unions, industry lobbying groups, CBI, FSB, civil society organisations, their ability to engage effectively with the EU institutions, now we're moving into a new era, do they need, do they have the expertise so the non-Government organisations, to be able to lobby effectively and if they don't what do they need to do?

**Nathalie Loiseau**

Well, they have started to do so, as I mentioned earlier, they were coming to us before to try to know what was the British position, so it was weird, but it was for us symbolic of their difficulties. Now they are coming back to us listing their priorities, their concerns and the ways forward and we pay a lot of attention because indeed even for our own vital interests improving relations with businesses on the other side of the Channel, improving exchanges with NGOs, with civil society, is something that we need and I would mention that France especially needs. We are very often portrayed as the bad cop of the European Union in the British media, just because we are vocal. We are vocal because other member states ask us to be, they say well the French can say it, we are protected. But if we are still very much interested in everything Brexit related it's because our relations with the United Kingdom are so intense that we don't want to see them hurt even more than they are already today. So indeed, we have to work with all stakeholders, they are of course welcome in Brussels and we have to reach out and go and see them on the ground, because I don't want it to be an insider conversation, what takes place in Brussels is important but I think that we have to win hearts and minds and public opinion so that people realise that it's in our common interests to do more and we are not there yet and the media, the British media are not all helpful on this.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP**

Je comprends, merci beaucoup. Georgina, again the capacity of UK lobbying groups, are they really up to speed with what they need to be doing now with the EU, could they be improved at all?

**Georgina Wright**

I mean, you know obviously it depends who you talk to but I think that was a missed opportunity at the beginning of the negotiations where you know you had big businesses that were active members of EU-wide associations who could have you know been an additional vehicle in explaining the UK Government's position and in researching my report on influencing the EU after Brexit they said well for a very long time we didn't really know what the Government's position was and so it was hard for us to not advocate for it but at least try and explain it, so it has to very much be a Team UK approach in the future and I think the Government realises this and has set up a number of kind of trade advisory groups now for different trade agreements, so I think that's taking shape. But yes, I think they do continue, I mean businesses adapt quickly to realities and you know I think particularly big businesses knew some of the change that would ensue from the TCA and you know were working very much with their counterparts, trying to ... they have good links many of them to member state

Governments as well as you know MPs and then MEPs as well, so yes I think that should continue and I think some of them do have good links but obviously it's not the case for smaller businesses.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP**

Thank you very much.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Well, thank you very much indeed. We're now moving the focus of this session onto the future relationship, and we have been joined by Ambassador Almeida, I just wonder if you would like to introduce yourself for the panel of the commissioners and also all the people who are watching our discussions today and it's a great pleasure to welcome you to our session, Ambassador.

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Well good morning, thank you very much for inviting me, it's a real pleasure to reconnect with you Hilary Benn, you've done great work in Commons on all these issues and were very pleased to cooperate with you, now in this Commission I look forward to the result of your work and more than willing to cooperate. I'm joined by a fantastic panel of speakers who I salute as well and so ready to contribute in whatever extent you wish useful.

**Hilary Benn MP**

That is really helpful. Now I've got a question I want to put because, and I want to come first to you Peter Ricketts, you said earlier that for the relationship to change between the EU and the UK you said there would need to be a different Cabinet to the one that we have at the moment, but I want to focus on a very specific issue which is highly pertinent at the moment. And it's this, there is the red line of the British Government which includes not being subject to the European Court of Justice, the red line of the European Union which the European Court of Justice is the determinant of whether the rules of the single market are being upheld and in any other trade relationship between two countries you would not have the Court of one party adjudicating on disputes about the interpretation of the agreement and therefore my question to you is what is the way out of this impasse and are the arrangements that are in the TCA to do with the level playing field, where the same argument took place but in the end the negotiators found a way which said well either side can say you're not abiding by the rules and take unilateral measures, might that form the basis of a new and a better relationship on something like a veterinary agreement which is highly relevant to the current difficulties when it comes to trade with Northern Ireland.

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

Wow. Well that is a very technical question indeed and one for the lawyers and of course it was central to the negotiation in all sorts of different domains. I think they did reach a kind of solution in the part three of the TCA on internal security and justice which provides for arbitration apart from anything else which is an important first step in all these things, and in terms of the jurisdiction of the ECJ, I mean what the UK will never be able to change is that the ECJ will adjudicate on EU laws as they apply in the EU, that's clear. But won't adjudicate on what applies in the UK. So it's always going to be an awkward fix, I don't think there's ever going to be a neat way around it. I think the

sort of conclusion that each side has the sovereign right to diverge if it wishes but then has to take the consequences of that in terms of reduced access or increased controls, regulations, is probably the only way but the complicated arrangements for consultation and arbitration, for example set out in the Northern Ireland protocol don't seem to me to be used as much as they should have been before at least one side reached for the threat instrument, the threat of suspension or withdrawal.

So given goodwill, those sort of slightly nuanced and conditional ways of tackling the problem are the right ones, but I don't think there's any cut and dried solution to this issue which applies particularly in the free trade agreement with the UK, I think because of the scale and intensity of our economic and social relations across the Channel. It's a much closer relationship than any other that the EU has with third countries and therefore the arrangements on the judicial side are always going to be more complex I think. But that's a layman's answer Hilary to an extremely important question.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Well, thank you Peter. Ambassador, yes I wanted to come to you.

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Yes, this was not in my initial list of questions that you asked.

**Hilary Benn MP**

I know but I'm seizing the opportunity.

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

I cannot refrain from reacting to it because I think there is a need for a very important clarification here. What you were referring to in your discussion with UK and everything that Lord Ricketts has said is of course valid but you referred to this discussion about the ECJ today, it is about Northern Ireland, it is not about the TCA in general, it is about the withdrawal agreement and the protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. And why is this important to clarify this is because Northern Ireland differently from GB, the rest of UK, has access to the single market for goods. So, in order to protect and preserve that element of our protocol, the fact that we wanted to guarantee that Northern Ireland would have access to the single market so that we don't need to put a hard border between the Republic and Northern Ireland, there has to be jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, there is no internal market without Court of Justice. The choice was made by the two of us, UK and EU, to have this protocol as the solution for the problems created by Brexit to the situation of Northern Ireland. One of the elements of the solution is to provide access of Northern Ireland to the internal market of the European Union to avoid a hard border with the South, in order to guarantee that we need the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. I think this is clear, I hope that this is understood because I see incompatibility if I can say that in bad English between having access to the internal market for goods and not being submitted to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, so I think in a simple way this sort of puts the discussion on the right basis.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Ambassador, thank you very much indeed. I'm sorry to throw that in but we're going to explore some of these issues in the remaining part of the session. I'm now going to turn to Professor Alan Winters, Alan.

### **Professor Alan Winters**

Yes, thank you Hilary and thank you panel members. I'm wanting to look to the future and ask just really by way of fact, yeah how is the EU organised for future UK discussions and in particular if any significant issues come up, I mean is the EU going to have to create mandates and appoint new negotiators, or is it something that the current structures in a sense can handle in pragmatic way, although I understand that word is a bit devalued at the moment. Let me perhaps ask the Ambassador, Ambassador Almeida if you could answer first of all.

### **Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Thank you very much, thank you for your question. I'll try to be short. It is clear that we have a set of agreements, we are now international law, the UK law, EU law and that our purpose now is to implement them properly and fully. The TCA covers a wide range of areas and as for seeing a number of bodies, joint bodies that will govern this relationship, they are beginning to meet for the first time, we will have between now and Christmas dozens of meetings of all these committees, they are what I call the engine room of this new relationship, particularly as far as economic matters are concerned. So, the bulk of our discussions from now on will take place within these committees and with a top structure, the joint partnership council co-chaired by Maros Sefcovic and David Frost. So this is the structure we have and that's through that structure that discussions will take place. We have parallel to that for the withdrawal agreement the joint committee, same kind of conception, same actors, where and also specialised committees. So there's a whole paraphernalia of bodies that, and tools that will allow us to manage this relationship in the best possible way.

And it is clear for us just to put any doubts to rest that we are not about to renegotiate any of these agreements that we've just concluded with United Kingdom. This being said there are a number of areas that were foreseen to be negotiated later, typically on Gibraltar for instance or in agreements in other specific areas where of course arrangements need to be made if need be for those, but the bulk of our discussions will run through the mechanism that have been created with the TCA and the withdrawal agreement.

### **Professor Alan Winters**

Thank you very much. And Nathalie also do you have anything, any further reflection on that?

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Yes, on the side of the European Parliament during the negotiation first of the withdrawal agreement and then of the TCA we had what we call the UK coordination group where a representative of political groups were meeting on a regular basis where the interlocutors of Michel Barnier and the rest of the parliament would trust us to build the position of the European Parliament on Brexit. Some of us were naïve enough to think that after ratifying the TCA that would be the end of the story, I was not one of them and I repeated that the UK would not be constantly a topic for in the first committee for point and that we would still need to coordinate the position of the European Parliament on everything Brexit related. Unfortunately I was right, so now I am a member of the UK

contact group which keeps on having discussions with Maros Sefcovic and with a number of stakeholders. We are creating the EU-UK delegation in the European Parliament, it's work in progress, and we will be part of the Parliamentary Assembly which is foreseen in the TCA and I look forward to it because I definitely think that apart from all the committees which Ambassador Almeida just described, there is an important role for members of parliaments on both sides to try to engage in quiet constructive conversation and we stand ready to do this.

**Professor Alan Winters**

Thank you very much. If Georgina will forgive me I'll perhaps pass back to the Chair in the name of time. Thank you very much.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Well, thank you very much indeed Alan. Next, Sir Roger Gale, Roger.

**Roger Gale MP**

Thanks very much Hilary. I've picked up on a degree of criticism of Theresa May for secretiveness and a degree of antipathy as well towards her, I have to say that's not an antipathy that I share. Nevertheless, I don't think anybody could accuse Lord Frost of being secretive, he seems to conduct his negotiations via the megaphone and I just wonder what the effect of that public criticism of the EU by the UK Government spokesman is, does that increase suspicion of the UK's motives or is it water off a duck's back? Peter Ricketts.

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

Well, I shall be interested in Nathalie's comment about that. I think my own observation is that the French and others are entirely used to criticism in the French tabloid media for example and you know I suspect it is to an extent water off a duck's back, but I think they tend to see the way that these points are being made publicly rather than through the negotiating channels as a bit of a proof that a lot of the purpose here is playing to the gallery in the UK, rather than seriously seeking to resolve the problem, that's it, that's the trouble I think. I think that then comes back to the issue we were talking about of trust and confidence, it's a little bit like the Prime Minister choosing the G7 summit in Cornwall to have a public row with Emanuel Macron about the supply of sausages to Northern Ireland, it does tend to make people think that a large part of the purpose of talking to the EU is to be able to report back to the base that you know a good row was had and Britain laid down the law. So, I don't think now that we are in a period where we have to persuade and influence from the outside that megaphone diplomacy is good.

What I was saying about Theresa May was that she was secretive even with her own side as far as I can gather, that everything was so tightly held that other spokesmen for the British Government didn't really know where the negotiations were. This is about using the press to try to put pressure on the other side and I don't think that works.

**Roger Gale MP**

Yes, I think my own experience of that is that the cards are played close to the chest in the interests of reaching an agreement that was ... through negotiations that were conducted in private rather than through the megaphone. Nathalie, what's your view of all this?

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

Well, to be honest to be a dedicated Anglophile it's not something so popular for a French politician these days and it's true throughout Europe. When you say that we have to do more, that we have to fix problems and that we have to engage with the United Kingdom on common challenges people stare at you and tell you, you really want to talk with these guys? And you have to say well, leave aside tabloid literature, leave aside posturing for domestic consumption and definitely there are things that we have to do in common. But what really doesn't help is that when there are lost opportunities, like G7 which could have been a fresh start and became a conversation about sausages. When we learned about extension of grace periods, not throughout the dedicated committees but in the press. When we have a discussion with Maros Sefcovic in the UK contact group and at the very same moment Lord Frost threatens to trigger Article 16, well we have all blundered with Article 16 and I was extremely angry at the European Commission at that time because they were engaging in exactly what isn't helpful in our relations, but the mistake was fixed in a few hours. But really, it doesn't help. Our public opinions keep on repeating to us leave them, don't bother answering their screams, be tough, resist, instead of let's try to build something positive.

So really a change in tone would help people really who are trying to find solutions.

### **Roger Gale MP**

Yes, I think a change in tone sometimes has to be two-sided, I'm not sure that Mr Macron is always backward in coming forward on these matters. Georgina, what's your view of this?

### **Georgina Wright**

Thank you Sir Roger and I agree, sometimes it's good to look at what the EU is doing as well. I mean to be honest I think most people have moved on and it's kind of what I said at the beginning, since moving to Paris no one ever talks about Brexit, even when there was the issue in Jersey it was quite limited and also I think when people do pay attention because it's still very much confrontational tone, a bit antagonistic, that it just seems to place a bit of boredom and it's kind of the sense of well we'll come back once this is past, maybe this is just the politics at the moment. But I think that's worrying because the longer this goes on, you know the riskier it is that actually both sides just don't understand you know what their positions are and I think you know to take Terry's very valid point earlier when she said you know the State of the Union speech by President von der Leyen didn't mention the UK once and that was silly maybe they should have, but it kind of again shows the sort of, the complexity that the negotiation of the UK-EU relations is still definitely through the Brexit prism and it needs to move beyond that. And I'll just say as an anecdote, I remember talking to one of my colleagues who said you know they are only the British who think that every morning the French wake up worrying about what's happening in the UK and what the UK thinks of France, we don't, we've other things to do and I think it's just important for that context. I hope we can move on beyond that, I think that both sides need to talk to each other, there's a lot that they can do in the integrated review, talks about you know the UK and EU cooperating in areas of mutual interest, but I

think at the moment that's very difficult given some of the confrontational tone and some of the issues that still need to be resolved.

**Roger Gale MP**

Thanks, I've got a big red note here that says 'not for the Ambassador' my impression is that diplomats are normally quite good at diplomacy, but if you want to comment in a minute, you can do so, Sir. Moving forward though, the UK obviously is now outside the regular meetings of the European Union, although we do have other platforms through for example the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and indeed the Council of Europe itself, but how much of this lack of contact is a loss to both sides and are there ways of, are there concerns about having informal meetings for example with the United Kingdom?

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Thank you very much. I'm not afraid of any question and ...

**Roger Gale MP**

I thought you might not be.

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

The previous one is an interesting one but I have my limits in terms of my capacity to do so, but if I go back to your previous question, just not to avoid it. I think we, and I've been advocating that for some time, we need to try to change the mind-set in our discussion in order to look forward instead of backwards, in order to try to build bridges instead of you know scoring points on past battles and that's what we are doing right now, if you look at the recent events regarding the most difficult file which is Northern Ireland, we have as European Union scaled down our action, we have paused our legal infringement procedures in order to find and create time and space for exactly what I think we need now is to pause and try to find solutions for the problems, and that's how we try to contribute in a positive way and that's what we're doing as we speak, discussing with our British friends ways and means to find a practical solution to alleviate the burden on citizens and business in Northern Ireland, which were never forget initially provoked by Brexit and the withdrawal from the single market and the custom's union.

Regarding your second question, you know I think it's obvious for us and it's certainly my personal position that Brexit is a lose-lose situation, I think we lose on both sides. But of course we as much as we regret the decision we fully respect it so our purpose now is to limit the damage created by Brexit and potentiate the good things that the TCA can bring to all of us. So, the loss is on both sides, you know for you British people to assess the degree of loss on your side, on our side we lose an important member of the European Union, an international important actor but you know we have to move forward and the state of mind as Georgina was referring earlier, is very much that of moving forward and trying to you know deal with the tools that we have, and I think the TCA is an enormous potential, but beyond TCA and I think that's the purpose of your question, I think we can and we should develop mechanisms of cooperation, of dialogue on issues of common interest and I think the reality will force us in that direction to be very frank. If I take climate, if I take the post-Afghanistan



situation, if I take relationship with the important partners like Russia or China, if I take Iran, if I take the rebalancing of our relationship with United States, on all those fronts you will find a lot of common ground between us and United Kingdom, what we need to do is to be sort of adult enough and mature enough to accept that we need and we must continue to cooperate in a different set of circumstances, in a different environment, because it is different to be in but to be out and this should be clearly understood. But regardless of that I think all points in the direction as moving forward finding informal or more formal ways of cooperating, certainly within the TCA and the agreement but I would say even beyond that. And I will try to modestly contribute to that.

### **Roger Gale MP**

That's very helpful and very refreshing. Georgina.

### **Georgina Wright**

Thank you very much Sir Roger. I mean completely agree with what's just been said. There's obviously what happens around discussions around the TCA and those are very much going to happen within that joint committee structure that exists, but for everything else you know be that climate change or cooperation on sanctions and all the rest of it, the UK and EU will need to find a way to you know discuss these things formally but also informally and it exists, you know if you look at there are a number of EU council meetings at ministerial level or even at official level where on the fringes they'll invite you know neighbouring countries to come and contribute, so that happens already, there's something called Agimnig [ph 1:25:18.9] where it's the foreign affairs council that meets informally so it's all the EU27 foreign ministers and then sometimes they'll invite foreign ministers from Norway, from Switzerland, from Turkey, so it has happened in the past and those are opportunities that should be seized upon. But of course it's not just up to the Government, it's very much you know parliament relations, business, civil society, again I've mentioned this report before and I'm sorry to be plugging it again but my report on influencing the EU after Brexit just shows multiple ways that we can have these informal discussions to make sure that if we're not going to cooperate, at least we understand what each other's position is. And of course I can't help myself but I think the Embassy and I'm not saying that because the Ambassador is there, but obviously the Embassy plays a crucial role in conveying the state of the British UK debate about the EU and so favouring, you know not only reaching out to people who are based elsewhere in Europe but also very much using people who are and speaking to people who are based in London and in the UK is very important as well.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

OK, Roger we'll need to move on if that's OK. Thank you very much for that. Next it's Anatole Kaletsky. Anatol.

### **Anatole Kaletsky**

Thank you very much. So, the Ambassador said we should move on and my question is really about how we move on to a new and different relationship in the long term and I'd like to know really what are the EU's priorities for a future relationship with what will after all be its biggest and is its biggest and most important neighbour. Earlier in this discussion we mentioned how it was a big missed opportunity by Theresa May who could have sought, even after the referendum, an EEA or EFTA or perhaps Swiss type of relationship, if that were to become possible in British politics in the long run,

would that be welcomed by Europe or is there a feeling in Europe that actually the EU has become more cohesive and more effective as a result of Brexit and perhaps a distant relationship is more desirable? Perhaps the Ambassador could primarily answer that question.

**Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Thank you very much. I'm sure yourself and you know the members of panel and those who have diplomatic experience know that rule number one of a good diplomat is not to comment on hypothetical scenarios, and you've referred to a number of them which I think to national decisions on which I don't wish to comment.

But you know every relationship is a living relationship and it evolves between people and between countries and I'm sure this will be the case as well. I don't know which direction. I think our priority now and it is was for our priority, our priority is to make this relationship work under new circumstances, it will be different and there should be no illusions and times I see some illusions there that you can be out and still have some of the privileges of being in, that is unfortunately not possible. We came to very creative solutions regarding Northern Ireland but the rest is what is in the treaties and that we need to implement. But, and that's our first priority, make this relationship work, make the withdrawal agreement and the TCA with all its potential and I refer to the machinery that is going to run it, we need to make this operation work to the benefit of our citizens and our businesses. And in the context of this implementation and increased discussion I'm sure what we'll find on one side some problems that we had not foreseen, that will come up and Madame Loiseau was referring to her anticipation of the fact that Brexit will not go away and I agree with her and this relationship is so intense on all fronts that problems will arise that were not foreseen. And maybe potential for a good cooperation will also appear and lead us to more positive territory in some areas. So I think we need to be open-minded to it and that's where we are right now.

One thing that we don't want to do, and we don't think we should do, is to talk about renegotiation or to talk about opening issues that have been thoroughly discussed and for which we did not find any more viable alternative. Our approach is to move forward, look forward in a positive spirit with a positive mind-set and that's what I hope for this relationship.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Anatole we can't, you're still on mute.

**Anatole Kaletsky**

Yeah, is there perhaps time Hilary for Nathalie to comment on this question, the longer-term relationship from the French point of view, yeah.

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

And if there's a moment I wouldn't mind a word as well, possibly.

**Hilary Benn MP**

OK well we've got about three minutes for your two contributions, so Nathalie first.

### **Nathalie Loiseau**

I'll try to be brief, I was a former diplomat but I'm a politician so I'll be a little bit freer than my dear friend the Ambassador to speak my mind. Of course it's a loss, of course not having the UK with us. I was listening to Ursula von der Leyen yesterday, listing our priorities, climate change, digital, sovereignty, [inaudible 1:31:13.3], health, defence, they are British priorities as well, they are challenges that we have to face if we are not facing them exactly together so that's a minus. But to be really honest there are things that we are doing right now on which we wonder whether we were able to do them if the UK was still a member state. I'm thinking of the recovery package, I'm thinking on progress on European defence, on which well the UK was not always very enthusiastic when it was a member state. So we have to mitigate and work with the two things.

The UK is a third state out of its own choice and the type of Brexit which was chosen it is a pretty hard Brexit, but it's a special third state and we have to find solutions, you know that for instance the European intervention initiative which was triggered by France includes the UK and discussions or thoughts about a European security council should involve the UK there is no doubt about it, as a French I miss the capacity to think global that not that many member states have in Europe.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

Peter.

### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

In one minute, I very much agree with the Ambassador that the first step is to make work what we've got and what we signed up for which is a way of rebuilding confidence on both sides and that is a point of departure. I think the mind-set should be that the TCA is a flaw not a feeling to the relationship and as trust rebuilds over time, and it will take time, then it will be possible to extend it, but it won't if one side is not confident that the other will stick to its word. And I think in that sort of period before we can start to build on top of the TCA, working together on third issues where both sides have got key interests is vital and I would just put climate change on the table, I mean the Glasgow climate summit is now a mere six weeks away and the EU and the UK have very, very common interests in that. So the more we can help solve problems outside the EU working together, that will all help to build confidence ready for some reconstruction when that becomes possible.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

Thank you very much indeed. Thanks Anatole. Right, now I'm going to bring in Claire Hanna, Claire.

### **Claire Hanna MP**

Thank you very much Chair, a very interesting session. Obviously Northern Ireland is sensitive in the Brexit context and very complex, the root problem is that many of our own elected representatives here don't understand the challenges and the risks, but I wanted to ask about the continuing level of understanding of those complexities within the EU, for what it's worth I think most in business and elected representatives have been really impressed at the level of engagement and understanding,

particularly in the Commission and by Barnier and subsequently Sefcovic and their teams, but do you think those complexities are widely understood. I suppose through the political teams of other members, we obviously had the near miss triggering in January which has been ruthlessly I suppose distorted by those seeking to undermine the protocol, but is there a risk of frustration or boredom about having to grapple with the complexities of Northern Ireland. Georgina spoke in an earlier answer about I suppose the fact that people have moved on, is that going to be a problem that people sort of think we have sorted out the Northern Ireland problem and they don't have the, I suppose bandwidth to continue to get their head around the complexities. Ambassador could I come to you first on that question please?

#### **Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Yes, thank you very much, thank you for the question. Northern Ireland is top of my in tray I can guarantee you, I've just come out of Northern Ireland was my second visit and I have not visited much because of Covid, my first visit out of London since my appointment, after my appointment, was to Northern Ireland and I was there for the second time, this time for the first visit of Maros Sefcovic and I can tell you that this is a good illustration of our commitment to Northern Ireland and it's a complex situation as we all know, so you know it's good that we go, it's good that we talk, we saw all the political leaders including your friend, your leader in Belfast, a good friend and a good contribution to this file as all the other leaders and we met business people extremely interesting meetings there, so the EU on our side we are committed to the people's prosperity process, the Good Friday agreement, [inaudible 1:36:39.8] been there, we continue to be there, I visited a number of projects of the Peace Plus [ph 1:36:44.1] where we were on the ground with the two communities trying to sort of really building the building blocks of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and we now within the framework, post-Brexit framework trying to find the right solutions for the protocol.

But you're right, complex question, sometimes I need to be pedagogical towards Brussels as well because you know people have different degrees of knowledge about Northern Ireland, but I can guarantee you that on our side I don't want to comment on the UK Government's position on this, but on our side fully committed to Northern Ireland, top priority and we want particularly this protocol to work because it's an important element of the overall relationship with United Kingdom.

#### **Claire Hanna MP**

Thank you, Nathalie could you comment on the same thing? I suppose outside of the political core within the members, is patience potentially wearing thin?

#### **Nathalie Loiseau**

I think everybody paid a lot of attention to Northern Ireland since the beginning of the negotiation of the withdrawal agreement, I mean time was spent to try to draft the backstop and then the Northern Ireland protocol and all the stakeholders involved deeply in the specificities and the tensions and the risks that are specific to Northern Ireland and this notion that we have to protect the Good Friday Agreement which was a success due notably to the involvement of the European Union and the fact that we are not only talking about trade but also about people and about communities and a political situation which is very difficult, is in everybody's mind. Is it at the core of the priorities of member states on a daily basis, no. But we know that we have to make it work, we have to make work what we decided in common and this is the Northern Ireland protocol, because we've been through all possible options until we found this equilibrium and we won't know exactly what to do until the

protocol is fully implemented and we see what remains to be done. Maros Sefcovic indeed was in Belfast recently, he's working on a number of proposals, he's been working on this since before December, so yes there is a lot of attention, there is a lot of interest. Do we understand everything that would be naïve to say that, we are doing our best, we are very united and very [inaudible 1:39:43.3] with the Republic of Ireland because they are the first to see consequences of the risks and tensions, but yes, we are doing our best.

I think that there is one more thing that we should do and this would be to discuss with our stakeholders in Northern Ireland because they are becoming rule takers of what is being decided in the European Union because they belong to our single market and I think that we have to do our part to explain first the benefits, but also where we are heading to and pay attention and take time and show respect for Stormont and for all stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

#### **Claire Hanna MP**

Thank you I appreciate that. Lord Ricketts, Peter, do you see a similar level of understanding and commitment on the UK side to the delicacies of Northern Ireland?

#### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

In a word, no. Indeed I think there's an astonishing ignorance about the realities and the nuances of Northern Ireland outside a specialist circle. I mean there are clearly specialists in London and Westminster who understand it and many people in Northern Ireland understand it, but no, in the wider UK public debate I think there's enormous ignorance, indeed I don't really recall Northern Ireland figuring in the referendum campaign very much at all, and so the complexities hit everyone afterwards. And I think that is a real problem, I think on the EU side I was very encouraged to hear what the Ambassador said, it's such a priority for him, and I think Nathalie's last point is really important, that the businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland are actually part of the EU single market and need to be treated as stakeholders as such.

I think it's probably inevitable that the EU will tend to look at the problem through the prism of Dublin because Dublin is a member state, but I think it's impressive how much effort their specialists have made to understand Northern Ireland, nonetheless I'm left with the feeling that the protocol was a very competent technical effort to solve essentially political problems, intensely political problems in Northern Ireland, and I'm not sure that they will ever entirely work in capturing all the political sensitivities in Northern Ireland. So this is going to be something we continue to live with, but no, I wish that the knowledge and interest frankly in the issues of Northern Ireland was more widely spread in British public debate.

#### **Hilary Benn MP**

Now Claire I'm afraid we're going to have to move on if that's OK, thank you very much for your questions. Aodhán Connolly, the floor is yours.

#### **Aodhán Connolly**

Thank you very much Chair. Ambassador, it's nice to see you again, twice in two weeks, people are going to start talking. Madame Loiseau, it's nice to see you as well. Actually I had something pop up at the start of the week which was a photo of us in my timeline, three years this week since I last saw

you in person, it's lovely to see you. I'm going to again talk about the protocol and about Northern Ireland. What I would like to know is whether or not there can be a renegotiation or there can be re-engagement with the protocol should that be with an annexe or a codicil or something else to provide that removal of friction that Northern Ireland business and Northern Ireland communities so desperately want. Again, I'm very grateful for the level of engagement that we're having with both sides at the moment and especially with the EU, the specialised committee members and Vice President Sefcovic being over a couple of weeks ago was very, very welcome. But that's kind of where we are now as Northern Ireland, wondering what can be done as far as both sides. I'm actually going to start this time with Lord Ricketts as far as where he sees the landing zone for the UK, what more can the UK do and then I would like to go to Ambassador Almeida.

#### **Lord Peter Ricketts**

Well thank you very much indeed Aodhán and I am far from being a specialist on Northern Ireland so I will be very interested in the Ambassador's answer. I mean my only feeling is that there is no scope really for a root and branch renegotiation of the protocol at this point, I mean having only signed it less than two years ago after all the work that went into looking at alternative solutions, it's a very fine balance of interest between the two sides. I think for my part, I think that the priority ought to be to make it work, to use the arbitration mechanisms, to get a real discussion going between the two sides on the complexities rather than through the megaphone, but not imagine that a renegotiation of the protocol is going to be possible. And since I seem to be losing my voice, I'm going to hand over to the Ambassador.

#### **Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Thank you very much Aodhán nice to see you again, it's always a pleasure to engage with you and I praise of your efforts to try to find solutions together with your business colleagues in Northern Ireland. Let me say, my reply to your question on renegotiation is the following, short answer, no. Long answer, we need to find ways and means within the protocol to address the problems that you have extensively presented to us in different meetings and that we have discussed with our British colleagues. This solution as Lord Ricketts was mentioning was shaped, agreed, signed and ratified by both sides, very recently, the ink is not even dry on this protocol. And it is the result of a careful balance of different interests and different dimensions and it is also the result of the fact that we didn't find any alternative to this protocol, able to do what I call the squaring of the circle in Northern Ireland which is to protect the Good Friday Belfast Agreement, protect the integrity of the constitutional law of the United Kingdom and the integrity of the single market. You know, I'm sure if there had been an alternative we would have found it and so if we remove the protocol, some people mentioned that, not in Northern Ireland by the way, I didn't hear anyone suggesting to scrap the protocol, but remove the protocol will not solve any issue, the protocol is in fact the solution for the problems created by Brexit and failing to apply the protocol will simply take away the tools to solve this problem, so we believe that the solution for these problems should and can be found within the limits of the protocol and that's exactly what we are doing right now. As I said earlier, we did our best to create space and time for the kind of discussions we had two weeks ago in Northern Ireland, the kind of discussions that are taking place as we speak between our teams, so that we can you know somewhere in the fall try to reach an understanding on steps that we can take to address the problems in a practical, pragmatic and constructive way. This is what we are focusing now.

A full renegotiation as Maros Sefcovic said in Belfast would only create de-stability, uncertainty, and unpredictability, it would change exactly what you Aodhán and your colleagues from business told us that you do not want.

**Aodhán Connolly**

Thank you, I just want to go to Nathalie please. Is France and the other member states, but particularly France, are you willing to, are the French willing to move and be pragmatic on this as well?

**Nathalie Loiseau**

I think pragmatism has always been our key word, but pragmatism doesn't mean that you forget about your previous commitments, on the contrary. Pragmatism means as the Ambassador just said, that you provide certainty, pre-visibility, to all the stakeholders. We have not yet seen the full implementation of the Northern Ireland protocol and it's already blamed for things that it's supposed to create, whereas the solutions have not been triggered yet. So, let's work with goodwill, good faith, let's address every specific single issue [inaudible 1:48:52.2] in raising the problems that have to be dealt with. You know that the EU has made offers on medicine, on sanitary controls, very concrete day-to-day concerns of people in Northern Ireland and this can be done within the protocol, so let's work on this, let's stop posturing, let's not be the hostage of political games where the situation of citizens is key and we will never give up on protecting our single market, this is something that I'm sure everybody bears in mind, but it's even better to repeat it.

**Aodhán Connolly**

Thank you very much. Chair, back to you.

**Hilary Benn MP**

Thank you very much indeed Aodhán. Right, we now come to our final question I'd like to put to all of you because we have, Brexit has happened, we've spent the morning discussing what the future relationship between the UK and the EU might look like. What improvements, where would you start to try and rebuild that, to build that new relationship and I was going to start with you Peter, there's been talk about performing artists, a veterinary agreement, there are lots of things that have been discussed and debated, what would you identify briefly as the areas it might be prudent to begin with and in the process to build trust on both sides?

**Lord Peter Ricketts**

Thank you and thank you for this whole session which has been really fascinating. I mean not just because I'm an old diplomat but I would say foreign policy. Britain and the EU look out at the World from the same perspective, we have the same interests, we were both humiliated by American decisions on Afghanistan, we are approaching issues like the climate change conference the same way, that is an area which should be low political risk, it should be in the interests of all sides, let's as Nathalie said take up the offer of the European Security Council of debating security and defence issues with EU partners as they think about autonomy, that seems to be a natural area to begin the process of reconnecting in the interests of both sides. I think all the others, the closer you get to the economic and social relationship the more the ideology and the political difficulties kick in, so much as I would like to see individual issues like veterinary issues or right of musicians and performing

artists to move around Europe to be eased or Erasmus, I think those are all more difficult than starting on the foreign policy agenda.

**Hilary Benn MP**

OK, thank you very much indeed. Georgina.

**Georgina Wright**

Thank you very much. So I'd begin by saying it's going to be very difficult to do that without trying to resolve or at least improve some of the difficulties around the Northern Ireland protocol, so I think that's going to be the number one priority, but then I think we need to be actively trying to rebuild trust before we try and improve the TCA and I completely agree with Lord Ricketts, it starts off obviously with, you know foreign policy is like not an easy one but because we see eye-to-eye on many issues it should make that dialogue easier. But there are other areas like space for example, you could think of climate change which the Ambassador mentioned. But also working together be that UK-EU or UK-EU27 through the OECD in other international organisations, so I think you know there are lots of issues around governance, around international law and also tax for example, taking big companies, digital companies, that's something that came out in the OECD, that came out in the G7 and it came out in the G20 and I think those are ways that the UK and EU or the UK and EU countries can continue to talk and try and rebuild that trust.

And finally then you come to improving the deal itself and I think there are lots of potential ways that you could simplify some of the rules around the checks and paperwork required for imports and exports, but also things like mutual recognition of professional qualifications, movement of services, suppliers, you know recognition of conformity assessments and all of that, but I don't think we can really get there until there's more trust and until we've resolved the Northern Ireland protocol and for the EU and EU countries a clear view that the UK is trying to meet the commitments that it signed up to.

**Hilary Benn MP**

OK, thank you very much indeed. Nathalie.

**Nathalie Loiseau**

Well of course I will go back to foreign policy because it was included in the political declaration and it's still very much needed. Of course, Afghanistan shows us that we have to do things together, but and the terrorist threat that is getting higher because of the victory of the Taliban. On sanctions regimes we have to coordinate closely, on foreign interferences as well, China, Russia have unfriendly behaviours going through disinformation or cyber attacks and these are things that are as contagious as a virus and we are stronger fighting against them together. But I also would like to go back to something more basic, let us not forget about citizen's rights. It was one of the first things we discussed when we negotiated the withdrawal agreement and it's not all that well set up as it's supposed to be. Visas, working permits, family reunions, quarantines have been a number of unnecessary obstacles, going against the interests of ordinary people, also going against the interests of businesses when you have manpower shortages and you are wondering how to get truck drivers



and waiters in restaurants. Why don't we go back to the good old pragmatism that we learnt from the Brits and try to improve the day-to-day situation of ordinary citizens who may have voted for leave or for remain or didn't vote because they were European citizens that now pay a high price for this political decision.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

Thank you very much indeed. And finally, to you Ambassador.

### **Ambassador Joao Vale De Almeida**

Well thank you very much, I took note of the good suggestions made. Let me be telegraphic but substantial if I may, my first point is three words, trust, trust, trust. This is a fundamental commodity in personal relations but also in international relations and I think we should all focus in raising, elevating, increasing the levels of trust across the Channel. How do we do that? I think we do it by showing political will, openness and willingness to find solutions, to implement what we have agreed and to move on. And in that list of priorities I would put Northern Ireland first as an area which we definitely need to do better and try to find the common ground, at the same time which creates the levels of trust we need. The second one climate change, we have Glasgow in a few weeks, we need a common front between us and the UK and then the others to make Glasgow a success. Thirdly we need to make the TCA work and we need to allow the TCA to be able to deliver. We did that as we start all these mechanisms of joint work, I'm sure we will find problems that we didn't foresee but we will also find areas on which maybe we can find solutions that were not for different reasons contemplated in the TCA, but that can be addressed within the limits of the TCA. And my last point of course like many others foreign policy, we were disappointed by the lack of willingness on the British side to engage formally with us on this, I think the reality will prove us right in a way that you know we have so much in common, so much interests, the same values, the same let's say constraints in the international scene, this will force us to cooperate and maybe you know instead of building a wall from scratch we'll put building blocks on this wall and sometime we will have a nice building in terms of cooperation on foreign policy and security.

That's my hope anyway and again thank you for the invitation today.

### **Hilary Benn MP**

Well can I thank you Ambassador Almeida, Peter Ricketts, Georgina Wright, Nathalie Loiseau, and earlier Terry Reintke, all of you for giving up your time for what has been a really interesting and useful session. We are extremely grateful as the UK Trade and Business Commission to all of you for doing so and our work will continue informed by the insights and the expertise that you've shared with us today. I almost said 'order order' but that concludes today's session, you can log off. Thank you.