



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 19 - 23 February 2018

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Your feedback is always welcome!**

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Once again a week in Parliament was overshadowed by Brexit developments outside the House. The series of speeches being given by various senior Minister, intended by the Government to shed light on what the Government intends are leaving more questions than answers for Members.

I have spent the majority of the week in Brussels, at a NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting. These visits are a good chance for me to represent the UK on the global stage, but also to see the way our allies view the UK. It was, therefore, an interesting time to be with my NATO colleagues as the Government took further steps to outline what it wants the result of the Brexit negotiations to look like.

Tuesday

This short week in Parliament began with to questions the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Questions ranged from Turkey, the Illegal Wildlife Trade and International Peacekeeping. However, given the speech made recently by the Foreign Secretary on Brexit, questions inevitably turned to the subject yet again.

Members wanted the Foreign Secretary to clarify his statements regarding the regulatory framework the UK would adopt after Brexit.



Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary's 5,000-word speech on Brexit last week was described by one of his ministerial colleagues as follows:

"He is completely in denial about the complexity of the exit and the negative economic...consequences."

Will the Foreign Secretary clear something up? Is he in denial or is he just wrong?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): If I may, I will respectfully resist the alternatives that the hon. Gentleman lays before me. Last week, I was trying to make the point that we now have a massive opportunity to come together—people who voted

remain and people who voted leave—to get a positive arrangement and a positive Brexit that will be of massive benefit to people both in this country and in the whole of the European continent. If we are ambitious and positive, I have absolutely no doubt that we can pull it off.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary claimed last week that it would be “intolerable” for the UK not to set its own regulations after Brexit. The next day, a Harvard survey of UK importers and exporters found that the last thing that they want is the dual regulatory burden of having to comply with both UK and EU rules. Will the Foreign Secretary tell us who is right?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): I think that the Harvard survey is right: nobody wants two sets of regulations to be imposed on the UK economy. That is why the Prime Minister was completely right—wasn’t she?—at Lancaster House and, indeed, in Florence and in sundry other places when she said that Brexit means taking back control of our money, our borders and, above all, our laws. That is what we are going to do.

The Foreign Secretary was followed by an answer to an Urgent Question in the Medical use of Cannabis and a Statement on Northern Ireland.

Aid Sector: Safeguarding

Following the revelations about the behaviour of some of the staff at Oxfam which have come to light recently, the Secretary of State for International Development was in the Chamber to give a Statement on the Government’s intentions.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. The Scottish National party is horrified at these revelations. Any form of sexual misconduct is completely and utterly unacceptable. Today’s appearance by Oxfam and others before the International Development Committee has left many questions unanswered. There needs therefore to be a fuller inquiry into the reported sickening events in Haiti and others emerging by the day. Allegations have now been made against Médecins sans Frontières, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee. We hear a lot of apologies, but we need deeds to match those words.



Sadly, a picture has now emerged of a culture of bullying, harassment, sexual abuse and racism among agencies around the world. All the good and essential work of this vital sector has been deeply damaged by not just what has happened but the way it has been dealt with. We heard today that many individuals responsible for these appalling activities were not dealt with and instead were often just passed on to other agencies and charities. There clearly has to be accountability and safeguards put in place to rebuild that trust. Wherever we see this type of behaviour, whether in the aid sector, Hollywood or politics, it must not be tolerated.

It is deeply concerning that some members of this Government have not shied away from their desire to see the aid budget cut. This scandal must not be used by the Secretary of State as a tool for cutting aid funding. I therefore call on her to confirm today in this House unequivocally that organisations will not have funds unduly stripped from them as they go about their vital work in some of the most vulnerable communities on this earth.

The international aid sector does fantastic work, and we cannot let this scandal overshadow the overwhelmingly positive actions done and support given around the world by many. However, we need to get to the root of these

events and make sure, with robust safeguards, that they never happen again, or if they do, that action is taken immediately.



The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he says. We should note that the Charity Commission, as well as its other work, is liaising with its counterparts in the devolved nations, which will be part of any such work.

It was this Government who brought in the 0.7% target. We think that is right and has helped, and that other nations around the world look to us as a development superpower. If we want to meet the sustainable development goals, we need to ensure that we spend that money really well. I want to get the money to work harder: there are always improvements we can drive. We are committed to the 0.7% target.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, I will wait until I have information back, not just about Oxfam, but about all other delivery partners to which I may transfer work. Until I have back that information, I will not make decisions about current programming, because the welfare of beneficiaries and the safety of staff in the field are my prime concerns.

A final Statement was then made on the Government's announcement of a review of Post-18 Education. The House then moved on to the debating of a Bill on Postal voting and the Second Reading of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill. The day then ended with an Adjournment Debate on Arts Council Funding in Coalfield Communities.

Defence Committee

Away from the Chamber, the Defence Committee held one of its annual sessions reviewing the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is a promise of mutual support between the civilian community and its local Armed Forces. It is an important way to build trust and respect between the two groups and ensure our Armed Forces have a proper role and engagement with civilian life. The Annual review is therefore an important part in ensuring the Covenant is relevant and fit for purpose.

The Annual Report was published in December and this session is one of a series looking into that paper, picking up where the previous session left off. In the previous session I enquired about the scope of the Covenant.

Mrs Moon: Is the Covenant too veterans-focused? Sara, you made a comment earlier on and I picked it up. Are we moving too much to seeing the Covenant as about veterans, and not actually about serving members of the Armed Forces?

Group Captain Mahon: This is something that we picked up primarily through our engagement with local authorities on a regional basis, and something that we mentioned to the Secretary of State when we met him just before Christmas. It is absolutely right that the Covenant has a focus on the veterans community, and no one is for a moment suggesting that this is in some way a deliberate move to a solely veterans focus.

Sometimes we sense, particularly with things like local authority Covenant partnership boards and so on, that the agenda can be very veterans heavy.

That is not necessarily a criticism; it is just something to be aware and a little wary of. We asked the Secretary of State to take that forward to the ministerial board, to remind colleagues that the Covenant is there for the serving personnel and their families as well. He agreed to do that, so we hope to see that in the minutes.

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

As usual on Wednesday morning, the Prime Minister came before the House to be questioned by Members.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I do not know whether the Prime Minister has had a chance to read *The Daily Telegraph* today, but 62 of her Back Benchers want a bonfire of regulations and to destroy workers' rights in this country. When the Government's EU exit analysis was published, the Brexit Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), said:

"It does not consider our desired outcome"—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 835.]

Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity now to tell the House and the country: what is the Government's desired outcome?

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am very happy to: a bespoke economic partnership.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Okay. So, given that the Prime Minister ruled out any form of customs union post-Brexit, can she explain how she expects then to avoid a hard border with Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): The right hon. Gentleman and others have asked this question previously. I have already pointed out in this Chamber that the Government published papers last summer that showed how we can deliver exactly that—no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and a bespoke economic partnership with the European Union.



The, as ever, boisterous questions were followed by a Statement on the Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review. The House was then presented with a Bill on shared Parental Leave and Pay.

Finance (No.2) Bill

The Finance Bill was in the House for its Third Reading with several amendments to consider. The first of these was in regard to equality between people and across the Country.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In a Westminster Hall debate this morning, I outlined the benefit that the European Community brought to my constituency through the funding of vital infrastructure projects. Of course, there is a revenue follow-on from that, because road improvements lead to people being able to get to hospital quicker and other things like that. We are grateful for that. Does the hon. Lady agree that, in respect of the Bill, it would have been helpful had some consideration been given to the effect of the reduction of that money and what that will mean for the UK Exchequer? Indeed, it would have been helpful to consider what that would mean in terms of helping the Scottish Government to replace that funding, as and when.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. I made the point earlier about regional differences and the impact of Brexit. It is important not only in relation to the GDP reduction that areas might see because they will not be able to trade as easily with EU countries, but in respect of the money that came from the EU and was used for things like infrastructure projects. It is important that the Government counter those reductions.

When the Chancellor stands up to give his spring statement, which we hope will be light on tax changes—that is what tax experts and the business community are asking for—and when he delivers his Budget, it is incredibly important that he has done as much consultation as possible beforehand. He should not only speak to business organisations and Conservative MPs, as I know he does, but open the net wider and consult in advance on any tax



measures that he wishes to put in place. He should also take on board new clause 9, which would ensure that an impact analysis is carried out afterwards.

The day in the Chamber came to a close with a Motion on the Space Industry [Bill](#) before an Adjournment [Debate](#) on a UK Research Centre for Ceramics.

Leaving the EU: No-Deal Alternatives

Away from the Chamber, Westminster Hall played host to a [debate](#) on the options open to the UK upon leaving the EU. The discussion centre around claims the increasing complexity of the talks and the calls from many hard line Conservative MP's for exiting on WTO rules.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Up until now we have focused on the binary choice between the Government successfully achieving a good Brexit deal or a departure on the terms of the World Trade Organisation that almost nobody wants. That stands in stark contrast to the promises of senior leavers prior to the referendum. We were promised that Britain would have access to the single market and told that the idea that our trade would suffer is silly. Now we face leaving the single market and, in the worst-case scenario, on WTO terms. We were promised that there would be no change to the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Now we see that there are huge uncertainties about the issue of the Irish borders, with a few hon. Members even going so far as to criticise the Good Friday agreement.

We were promised that an EU trade deal would be the easiest in human history. Now we see just how ambitious that claim was. This is why I am calling this debate: we were promised a smooth and simple exit from the EU, and instead we have complexity and the risk of chaos. It is even more important now in light of the leaked letter from a small minority of my colleagues. These hard-line Brexiteers have a very strange view of what WTO rules or terms would mean. This is in marked contrast to the views of the vast majority of my colleagues, who would prefer to assess all the options available.

First, I would like to outline why a no-deal or WTO-terms Brexit would be quite so chaotic. A WTO-terms hard Brexit is greeted by some of my colleagues with considerable sangfroid. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) told the "Today" programme last year that

"we will do just fine"

if we leave on WTO terms. He was joined earlier this week by my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), whom I see in his place, who told the Daily Express:

"I'm entirely happy to continue trading with the EU on WTO terms."

I am afraid that I and many others are not entirely happy with this. Some 43% of UK trade is with the EU and I am not willing to see that prosperity put in jeopardy. It would be economically catastrophic to simply walk away from the negotiating table, crashing out.

Crashing out with no deal would lead to a reduction in EU trade of between 40% and 60%. That translates into between 4.8% and 7.2% of GDP. The impact of new tariffs on our trade would be hugely damaging. Around 45% of UK exports of goods and 54% of UK imports of goods would become newly subject to tariffs. While the simple average tariff is 5.1%, in some sectors this can be much higher: for dairy products—a key sector for my constituency—it is 39%; for preparations of meat and fish it is 40%; and for cars it is 10%. Tariffs would drive up prices for ordinary con-

sumers. A Credit Suisse report last year said that food prices could rise by 8%, with UK dairy warning of a staggering 51% increase in the cost of Cheddar. Credit Suisse also said that car prices could rise 15% and predicted a 20% drop in sales as a consequence.

Non-tariff barriers would also have a significant impact on industries where the supply chain is deeply integrated across borders. A KPMG study for the Dutch Government cites a number of concerns. It estimates the costs of customs formalities to be between €78 and €126 per shipment. These costs would likely be passed on to consumers in addition to tariff costs. They also have concerns about the capacities of ports, both here and on the continent, stating:

"Even brief delays will probably lead to long queues at terminals in the Netherlands and the UK."

This is not just a matter of physical capacity either, as we will need to ensure that our workforce develops customs expertise that has not previously been necessary. There are also questions about the capability and capacity of regulatory authorities. A National Audit Office report last year estimated:

"The number of decisions that have to be made over whether to permit people and goods to cross the border could increase significantly (potentially 230% and 360% respectively)."

I will make one final point about the border. There has been a recent push to suggest that an EU-UK hard border in Northern Ireland would not be an issue, as technology would solve every problem. These advocates cite the US-Canada border as an exemplar. I cannot agree. I refer colleagues to the evidence heard by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee in which Dan Mobley of Diageo said explicitly:

"It is not completely frictionless."



If the Government are convinced that this is an approach that can work and meet the need for a frictionless border, I would press Ministers to publish detailed plans of how it would work. Overall it is easy to see why the Treasury estimates that the cost of a WTO-terms Brexit would be around 8% of GDP over the next 15 years. It is also easy to see why it is important that we assess the alternatives to this disastrous course of action.

Defence Committee

The Defence Committee held a second evidence session this week in which the Committee had the chance to question the Secretary of State. This was in light of the announcement of the Modernising Defence Programme and offered a first chance for the Committee to question the relatively new Minister. The minutes of this meeting will be posted next week and will be included in next weeks TWIP.

Exiting the European Union Committee

In this week's session the Committee took [evidence](#) from various experts in trade in order to make an assessment of the various models open to Britain after Brexit. In light of the recent speeches and the letter sent to the Prime Minister from the ERG Back Bench Conservative, this seems like a particularly important issue which the Committee needs to consider. The minutes of this meeting will be posted next week and will be included in next weeks TWIP.

Thursday

Questions were put to the Secretary of State for International Trade and the Minister for Women and Equalities. Members pressed the Secretary of State for International Trade for more clarity on his post-Brexit plans.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Whether he plans to replicate the terms of EU free trade agreements in trade deals with Switzerland, Norway and Turkey after the UK has left the EU; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): As we leave the EU, the Government intend as far as possible to maintain the effects of existing EU free trade agreements and other EU preferential arrangements. That includes agreements with Switzerland, Norway and Turkey.



Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I am going to pursue the questions asked by my hon. Friends the Members for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), which the Minister for Trade Policy did not answer. In 2016, the Secretary of State told the International Trade Committee that he would prioritise securing an agreement with Switzerland. The current relationship between the EU and Switzerland is overseen by some 20 joint committees. Very specifically, how many of those committees will be replaced by UK-Swiss committees, and how far along in the process of setting up those institutions is his Department?

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): I met Swiss Ministers in Geneva recently, and we discussed what the future arrangement would be. Clearly, how we oversee the arrangement depends on what the arrangement itself is, and that is currently under negotiation.

The business of the day then continued with the Government answering an Urgent Question on Air Quality. This was followed by the Leader of the House stating the Business of the House for the following week.

Two Select Committee Statements were then made before the House. The first was from the Foreign Affairs Committee on Kurdish Aspirations and UK Interests and the Second from the Justice Committee on HMP Liverpool.

The House then moved on to Backbench Business.

Disabled People and Economic Growth

The first Debate of Backbench Business focused on the potential for disabled people to fill the employment gap that will emerge when we leave the EU and the challenges which need to be overcome to ensure more disabled people can find employment.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing the debate and for the examples she has given of good practices in certain organisations, but is she aware that only 16% of people with autism are in full-time employment and only 32% of autistic adults are in any kind of employment at all? Does she agree that much more needs to be done to close the autism employment gap?

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention highlighting the autism employment gap, which is far too large—much larger even than the disability employment gap. We must take extra strides to support people with autism into work, because they have great skills and abilities and they will be fantastic contributors to our economy given the appropriate opportunities.

The day then drew to a close with a Debate on Cancer Strategy and an Adjournment Debate on City of London Corporation Pensions.

Friday

The House sat on Friday this week with a number of Private Members Bills to debate.

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

The Second Reading of the Organ Donation [Bill](#) was met with cross party support throughout the debate. Members judged that the mood of the House and the Country as whole had changed and the time was right for this kind of initiative, already in place in Wales, to be embraced. The Bill passed through the House without the need for a vote.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the Bill, which I support. May I pursue the point made by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd)? I believe that in 2016-17, after Wales had introduced presumed consent, 13 out of 33 families withdrew that consent when they were asked about it. Can the hon. Gentleman assure me that the Bill will allow room for relatives still to be consulted and to withdraw the consent? After all, it is being asked for at a very sensitive time. I want us to ensure that families are given that latitude, while trying to do everything possible to increase organ donation.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): The right hon. Lady raises a difficult but important issue. As part of the soft opt-out, there will certainly be arrangements for families and close friends to express their opinions. It is interesting to note that in Spain, which has no register and operates what is effectively an opt-out system, there is always consultation with every family who can be reached in time in the absence of a register, and as a result of those consultations there is a tremendous rate of consent. It can, of course, work the other way as well, and the Bill will make full provision for that. It needs to be carefully worded, and I invite those with a particular interest to look at it, but the intention is to give families in that position an effective veto. I may not have fully picked up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd).



Overseas Electors Bill

The next Private Members [Bill](#) on the Agenda was the Overseas Electors Bill. This Bill aims to allow Britons living abroad to retain the right to vote in the UK.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing forward this Bill. Many areas of our constitution are controversial and partisan, but when I was a Minister in the Cabinet Office I was struck by the fact that Members of Parliament from all parties, particularly the Labour party, wrote to me on behalf of their constituents every single week to ask when the Government would deliver on this manifesto commitment. This is a non-partisan Bill that the House would be wise to take forward in a non-partisan approach. My hon. Friend mentioned the example of 97-year-old Labour voter and activist Harry Shindler, who fought in the Battle of Anzio in 1944. People like him gave so much for this country; we should pass this Bill and give them back their vote in return.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is important—certainly to me—that this is a non-partisan Bill. I have brought it forward because it will deliver justice to UK citizens living abroad. There are supporters on the Conservative Benches because I have asked them all to come. I am overwhelmed by their personal support, but I know they also think this is an important issue.

My second general point is on the importance of the Bill to British soft power across the world. We live in an increasingly interdependent world. The success and influence of British citizens overseas become ever more important, particularly as we leave the European Union. In Europe and across the wider world, our British interests are well served by the presence of UK citizens who are actively involved in civic society, businesses and diplomatic activity in the countries in which they now live. It is a hugely important way in which the British voice can use its presence overseas to the great benefit and interest of Britain. The absolutely last thing we should do in promoting the interests of Britain across the world is to discriminate against our own citizens who have moved overseas by taking away their right

to vote after 15 years. It is a huge mistake.

Although there were several more Bill s to be heard, including on the use of medicinal cannabis, the time constraints of the day did not all allow it.

The day ended with an adjournment [debate](#) on Eider Duck Conservation Zones.