



European Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Non-inquiry evidence session

Tuesday 10 December 2024

4.35 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Ricketts (The Chair); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Ashton of Upholland; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town; Baroness Lawlor; Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne; Baroness Scott of Needham Market; Lord Stirrup; Duke of Wellington.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 – 16

Witnesses

I: Stephen Doughty MP, Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, Paymaster-General, and Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations in the Cabinet Office.

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Examination of witnesses

Stephen Doughty and Nick Thomas-Symonds.

Q1 The Chair: A warm welcome to the House of Lords European Affairs Committee. This is our first public evidence session of this Parliament, and I am delighted to welcome Nick Thomas-Symonds, Paymaster-General and Minister for EU Relations in the Cabinet Office, and Stephen Doughty, Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories in the FCDO.

This is a very timely session, as the committee is considering the subject for our next inquiry. I know all members are keen to put a range of questions to the Ministers. To get as many in as possible, I would urge that questions and answers be kept concise. Ministers, please do not feel that you each need to answer each question—indeed, the reverse would be great—and I will aim to divide the time up equally as far as I can.

I will start by inviting Mr Thomas-Symonds to get the ball rolling for us and tell us in specific terms what the Government mean by the reset. We have read the manifesto, we know the priorities that the Government have set out, but does the Minister accept that the EU will also have a wish list of its own? In addition to youth mobility, in the last couple of days I have seen reports in the *Financial Times* of an EU paper saying that an early deal on fishing rights will be on the agenda, and it seems that any participation by the UK in the EU electricity market will be ruled out on the basis of no cherry picking.

Minister, the reset already seems to be getting complex quite quickly. The committee would be very interested to have your thoughts.

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: Thank you, Lord Ricketts and the committee, for having us before you, and an apology about the disruption so far. At least we will, hopefully, have a clean period of time to 5.30 pm.

Your first question is about the substance of the reset. I see the reset as having three areas, or three pillars as I call them when speaking about them in public. The first pillar is security and is about co-operation, particularly on foreign policy but obviously on wider defence matters too.

The second pillar I would describe as the safety of citizens. That is closer law enforcement co-operation in a number of areas of serious and organised crime on things such as counter-terror operations, tackling money laundering, and irregular migration.

The third pillar is growth and trade. You will have seen from our party election manifesto that this involves, for example, seeking to negotiate a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement with the EU, pushing forward on mutual recognition of professional qualifications in services, and what we can do to make it easier for our touring artists to perform in the EU.

Those three things are the pillars of the reset. I will just refer a little to the process. On 2 October we had a statement from the Prime Minister and the President of the Commission setting out the intention to move

forward. I was in Brussels with the Prime Minister on behalf of the UK Government, with Maroš Šefčovič obviously on the Commission side. We aim to have a UK-EU summit in the first half of next year, which then gives us a clear milestone for delivery.

To your point, I do not believe everything I read in the newspapers, of course, but the EU will bring its asks to the other side of the table. There is the bilateral aspect of the reset as well, which is Stephen's responsibility.

Stephen Doughty MP: On two additional points to what Nick has set out, first, there is the bilateral reset that we are engaged in with key partners across Europe. That has been a key part of my schedule. I have met almost all my counterparts and have travelled extensively. Our discussions on bilateral agreements, complementing the discussions that Nick and others are having with the EU directly, and particular projects such as the UK-Germany treaty and the defence agreement that was reached the other day, have very tangible and welcome outcomes.

It is important to be clear that this is part of a reset, not just with the EU, but with Europe writ large. The EU is a crucial part of that, but, if we look at where the challenges are for Europe as a whole, I have spent a lot of time engaging with our partners and friends in the Western Balkans, and I have been in Moldova, as has the Foreign Secretary, dealing with the Russian attempts to destabilise Moldovan democracy. I have been in the Arctic with our partners in Norway and Reykjavík, and in Iceland discussing matters facing the Arctic region and how we are co-operating with European partners there. So this is a very broad-ranging reset, very much in line with the three themes that Nick has set out and the missions that the Prime Minister has set out.

I can tell you that as part of every conversation we are resolutely focused on delivering the best outcomes for Britain when it comes to growth, to security, to tackling illegal migration, to working together on climate change and nature, or to energy co-operation. There is a set of interlocking relationships here: the bilateral role, the EU relationship, our NATO relationship, our JEF relationship, our membership of the Council of Europe, and the EPC process. We believe that all those are mutually reinforcing, and there has certainly been a very warm response to our engagement.

Most importantly, this is about tangible outcomes now. On the same day when the Foreign Secretary was in Luxembourg for the Foreign Affairs Council discussing the areas where we might co-operate, on security in particular and on foreign affairs, I was in Berlin as part of the Berlin process with President von der Leyen and our partners from across the Western Balkans. So this is about a tangible reset that is happening already in what we are doing.

Q2 Baroness Blackstone: You touched on issues of timetable, but I wonder if I could ask you to elaborate a bit more. You mentioned the likelihood of having, or the aim to have, a UK-EU summit in the second part of next

year, but are there any milestones before that? For example, is there going to be a start to the regular meetings that have been considered between the Prime Minister and the President of the European Commission? Are there any other milestones besides that which you could point to and help the committee with so that we can see the direction of travel and how fast it will be?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: The UK-EU summit will be in the first half of next year, and I hope we will be able to be a bit more precise on the date soon. As I am sure you can imagine, we have had to wait until the process of approving the College of Commissioners was completed, and indeed having the new President of the Council in place as well.

In terms of how it will work between now and then, I have already had a number of meetings with Maroš Šefčovič since the general election, and you will see that process every couple of weeks. Do not hold me absolutely to that, because there may be reasons why it might not be every two weeks, but we are talking about a regular rhythm of meetings between Maroš Šefčovič and me leading the negotiations.

The important next step in the timetable will be when we set the precise date for the EU-UK summit, which will then give us a very clear milestone. Both the President of the Commission and the Prime Minister were clear with Maroš Šefčovič and me about looking at deliverables for us to be able to have those things ready for the summit. It gives us a really good focus, a really good sense of pushing forward to have deliverables by that point.

Q3 **Baroness Blackstone:** Can I also ask you about publications? Either before that meeting or after it, are you going to publish an overriding policy paper about what the reset really means?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: I am not proposing to publish a policy paper. In terms of the objectives, there are examples of what we are seeking to do in our manifesto. I am loathe to do what happened in previous negotiations, where you start demanding things that are completely unrealistic or you try to make assumptions about what the other side might wish to ask for. Obviously, the EU is going through its own process as well in terms of its positioning.

We have those examples from the manifesto, and we will take that forward into what I suspect will become the harder edge of the negotiations in the new year.

Baroness Lawlor: Could you remind the committee what the examples in the manifesto are?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: The three pillars are essentially where the examples are. The security pact is how it is described in the manifesto. There is talk in the manifesto, for example, about closer law enforcement co-operation. To give another concrete example, we often talk about sharing data in real time with Europol, which is designed to ensure that there is no place on the continent for criminals to hide.

On the growth and trade pillar, the three things that are mentioned are, first, seeking to negotiate a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement; secondly, mutual recognition of professional qualifications in services; and, thirdly, the issue of trying to deal with visas for touring artists.

Baroness Lawlor: Nothing else is on the agenda.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: The point I made to Lord Ricketts is what stands here. It will be for the EU to have its particular agenda. We see lots of rumours and suggestions as to what those things might be. I can control what we put on the table and what we are looking for when we go into the negotiating room. Those are examples of the things we are looking for, but it is also for the EU to come forward with its requirements.

Stephen Doughty MP: The aim is to start with a security partnership, leading in due course to a deeper and broader pact, and we have agreed that we will advance work on that. There will be a series of six-monthly foreign policy dialogues. That process has already started, and we are hoping that we will be able to start work on strategic consultations on Ukraine-Russia, hybrid threats, the Western Balkans, and the Indo-Pacific. There is a whole series of issues in that space and a broader set that we hope would come in due course, subject to the conversations that we are having.

The Chair: The concept is clearly that the reset will be a process where both sides bring something to the table and the result is a negotiation on that.

Q4 **Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** You have already mentioned that the third pillar of the reset will be trade and co-operation. How does that fit into the forthcoming trade and co-operation agreement review due in 2026? Will you fit the one inside the other, or do you see this as a slender version of what may be coming in 2026? This, after all, is one of the most important things for British citizens, who see trade and co-operation with the EU as the formal reason for us being former members.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: I see the reset as getting ahead of the trade and co-operation agreement review, because the end date for that, from memory, is 1 May 2026. When the new Government came into office in July, we certainly were not proposing to wait months and months down the line until work started on the trade and co-operation agreement review, so the reset is designed to get ahead of it, and that is the way we will proceed. That is why we have the process of having the first summit in place: so that we can actually focus on that in 2025, rather than waiting until 1 May 2026.

Q5 **Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** Does the Minister see a closer relationship developing, despite our not being members of the European Union, although we are members of the Council of Europe? The next enlargement is, of course, focusing entirely on members of the Council of Europe. Do the Ministers see this as a way in which we could get closer

into that fresh integration, which is vital for the future, with Russia pushing further and further into Romania, for example? We have Ukraine, we have Moldova, as you say, and we have other Europe. How do you see this fitting? How do you make us as strong as possible with our current situation?

Stephen Doughty MP: You are absolutely right to highlight the work of the Council of Europe, the other bodies that were part of the OSCE and, of course, other forums like the EPC. All of these are of huge value to our relationships with a wider set of countries, and we are very pleased that a number of countries are pursuing a Euro-Atlantic path in many forms, particularly countries in the Western Balkans. We have seen the challenges that exist in somewhere like Georgia in recent days, and you will have seen the Foreign Secretary's statement on that.

What is key is that, ultimately, a decision whether to join the EU will be between them and the EU. We are not members. They want to be members. That is a process between the two. But there are mutually interlocking and supportive objectives here for peace, stability, prosperity, energy, and action together on illegal migration, so we are keen to work closely with our EU partners, for example, in the Western Balkans. That is exactly what we have been doing already as part of the Berlin process: to do things alongside that. That is why I will be having important conversations in due course, I hope, with the new Commissioner for Enlargement and the officials working on those areas.

There has already been very close co-operation between our special representatives in the Western Balkans, so this is a mutually reinforcing process, but ultimately it is a decision for them.

Q6 Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I want to push you a little, if I might, on what I call the vision thing. You have given some good examples that you picked up from the manifesto about changes in the economy side on phytosanitary, on mutual recognition of qualifications, especially in the services industry, and so on. These are really important pegs in the ground, but there is a bigger vision.

I want to ask you to think about what would be different by the time of the next general election. I know there is a limit to what you can say, but just in terms of what we should look forward to, what might we expect you to have pushed hard on?

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: That is a really good question. When you have this discussion about negotiations with the European Union, there are hugely important details, of course, and those are obviously part of any negotiation, but it is very easy to lose sight of the bigger picture and what you are actually seeking to achieve. We are in the mid-2020s, and we want to look forward, not back, in the UK-EU relationship. What are the many shared challenges that we face as a continent? Whether it is addressing climate change, whether it is Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, migration issues, these are huge economic issues that all, frankly, need continent-wide solutions to be found.

In answer to your question about what we are seeking to do, if you go back to my three pillars, we want the UK, and indeed the EU, to be more secure; we want our citizens to be safer and to have better and more effective law enforcement tools at our disposal; and we want our citizens and citizens in the EU to be more prosperous, because that is mutually beneficial. Safety, security, prosperity are the greater objectives of what we are trying to do in the reset. That is not to say that the details are not hugely important; they are. But it is also important to keep our eyes on that bigger picture.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: How do you respond to the thing that I hear most, which is, "It's all a bit slow. Can we speed up please?" There is a lot of interest in having much coming forward. I know the impossibility of all that, but that is what I hear, so I would be interested in how you address it.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: In terms of the speed of this, we had to wait until we had the new President of the Council in place, which we now do, and we had to wait for the College of Commissioners to be approved. We have taken action here. I am sure the committee will be very aware of the machinery of government change. Indeed, this committee recommended such a thing in the past.

The Chair: Indeed it did.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: That has happened. I have 50 or so staff who came in, and we have taken in the Windsor Framework team, so that preparatory work on our side is certainly going on. But in direct answer to your question about speed, we will move into a new phase in the early part of next year, because we have that EU-UK summit to aim for.

Stephen Doughty MP: It is absolutely the same on the security partnership side. There is a clear agenda set out there and we expect that to move forward.

Again, I would say, look at the actual evidence of what we have been doing together. Just this morning, I was meeting with EU counterparts and others on our counterterrorism co-operation in relation to extreme right-wing groups. We were with partners at the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting just last week, sat alongside Kaja Kallas, talking about our mutual support for Ukraine. These are very tangible things that are happening.

We have already had some successes in broader Europe reset terms. Take the area of co-operation on science and technology. It is wonderful news that a UK candidate was able to secure election as director-general of CERN, the particle physics laboratory, against stiff competition. Our new relationships with European partners meant that they had confidence in a new approach by the UK and a commitment to working on key scientific advances, and that delivered a brilliant UK candidate to lead that incredible institution. So that is real tangible evidence already of what we are doing.

The Chair: Would it be fair to say that you are aiming to have the relationship reset before the next election? Will the reset process be done by then?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: I certainly hope so. We will certainly be looking to deliver benefits from the reset by that time.

Q7 Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: Given the importance of taking parliamentarians, the public and others with us in a way that some felt did not happen over Brexit—particularly the devolved Authorities, particularly with regard to your third pillar on growth and trade, which may be a reserved activity but which, I do not need to tell you both, has enormous implications for the devolved Assemblies—it would be interesting to know what your plans are for talking to civil society, devolved Authorities, and indeed to parliamentarians via the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly. We would be really interested to hear who you are going to appoint as the chair of that.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: To your first point, I chair the inter-ministerial group where we meet and listen to the devolved Administrations on this issue.

Building on the reset theme, we have also been looking to reset our relationship with the devolved Administrations. Part of that has been a continuing dialogue with regard to their priorities to feed into the reset. That work is very much ongoing.

As regards the PPA, that is a really important body and, going forward, the interactions of that group will be hugely important. I will obviously want to keep in close contact with that group and indeed the chair, as Stephen will. Stephen will come on to this in a moment, but where we have all-party groups in Parliament with particular countries across the continent, those are really important as well. These parliament-to-parliament links are a hugely important part of what we are doing.

Stephen Doughty MP: They are critical. Regarding the devolved Administrations, you can be absolutely sure that one of the key questions I am asking when I am out in our bilateral missions is what they are they doing to represent the UK as a whole, to drive growth and investment and to build new partnerships, and what engagement they have with the devolved Administrations. I have met many of the devolved Administrations' teams in different missions and scrutinised what is going on there.

But, of course, it is not just about the Das; it is also about our metro mayors and our regions within England. There is a huge potential for greater co-operation between German Länder and different parts of the UK. Indeed, I was just discussing these issues in Türkiye last week as well, where there is huge potential. I was in Czechia discussing potential investments from Czech investment firms in the north of England. I keep talking about mission-led missions, but also our missions representing the full United Kingdom and all our interests. That is certainly a clear

steer that they have had from me and Minister Chapman, and the FCDO leads on devolution overall, so it will be a crucial part of what we try to achieve going forward.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: The Windsor Framework Taskforce is now based in the Cabinet Office, and that is obviously a critical part of the EU Relations Secretariat that we have created. There is the consent vote today, which may well have happened in the last hour. But just to be clear, we are very much co-ordinating that function and the Windsor Framework. It is very much at the heart of the work I am doing in the Cabinet Office on EU-UK relations.

The Chair: Thank you. As you know, a new Northern Ireland scrutiny committee will be set up in the House of Lords. We are waiting to hear the chair of that, and it will, I am sure, be an important interface for you in the Cabinet Office.

Q8 **Lord Stirrup:** I would like to turn, if I may, to the practicalities of co-operation. I am thinking in particular of your pillar 1 and perhaps pillar 2. I suppose the a priori question is: what do you mean by co-operation? If, for example, you mean talks in order to de-conflict and/or align completely separate endeavours, that is one thing. But if you mean acting together, there have to be mechanisms through which one can act together. One of the problems with third-party participation in EU endeavours is that third parties play a very subordinate role. For example, I have seen suggestions that we might participate rather more in CSDP missions. But if you are a third party in CSDP missions, you essentially do what the EU wants to do the way the EU wants to do it, and I presume that is not the sort of co-operation that the UK has in mind.

How do you see taking these issues forward? Do you see trying to persuade the EU to change its rules, which might be a rather tough endeavour, or do you see entirely different mechanisms for these kinds of co-operation?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: Stephen, you have been dealing with the security part. Do you want to take this?

Stephen Doughty MP: There is obviously a whole set of ways in which we can co-operate, and these will form very much part of the talks on the security partnership and hopefully a broader security pact in due course.

You mentioned the CSDP. Europe's security is critical to our own, and we recognise that the EU has a critical role to play in meeting those security objectives, so we are very open to discussions about opportunities for the UK to be part of, and work closely with, EU missions in a whole range of areas. There are discussions about PESCO, about defence industrial co-operation, about particular missions, and there is the geographical co-operation that we have through, say, the Moldova partnership platform or the Berlin process.

On top of that, we will have the very specific four dialogues that I mentioned, which will drive forward particular work in those areas in relation to tackling hybrid threats, for example. There are a whole series of issues that we can and must work on closely together. Yes, there are different regulations and rules on each of those, which will form part of the discussions and choices that we have to make. Sometimes there will be costs involved, sometimes there will be other considerations. I do not want to lock us into one particular thing or not at this stage, but we have an ambitious agenda to work together, because it is in all our interests.

Lord Stirrup: If I may press this, I do not think you have answered the question. The point is that if you participate through the current mechanisms, there is no way to contribute to policy formulation or strategic direction. You are just basically doing what other people decide you do. Is the UK Government's ambition to create, through changed existing mechanisms or new mechanisms, a process whereby the UK, alongside the EU, can develop common policy and joint strategic direction, or does it want to do such things completely separately?

Stephen Doughty MP: That is the whole aim of the partnership and pact that we are aiming to set up and, indeed, the dialogues in the specific areas that the Foreign Secretary has agreed. Our point is that if we are meeting regularly, we are agreeing strategic priorities together, whether that be on our approach to the Western Balkans or on Ukraine, and that allows us to develop the methods and mechanisms of co-operation that will have the best impact.

Sometimes that will involve us working very closely together, and other times it will involve us doing different things, working through the JEF or through NATO mechanisms, or otherwise, or unique structures like KFOR. There will be different fora in which we do that. You are well aware of all the different ways in which we co-operate together. The idea is that we are having a strategic conversation at that level. Heads of Government, Foreign Secretaries, Defence Secretaries and others are having that conversation and then implementing that forward in the best way, balancing off the different costs and benefits of doing so.

Q9

Duke of Wellington: The set question that I was asked to ask has been covered, in a certain sense, so could I completely change the subject? The Europeans, we understand, proposed a youth mobility agreement, and it was apparently fairly quickly rejected by the British Government. I was rather surprised by that, and I would like to understand what your aspirations are in that area, which seems to me, on the whole, to be benign for both parties.

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: The previous Government made various public comments back in May, so you will obviously have to ask them why they took the position they did. Youth mobility is not one of the examples in our manifesto. It is for the EU to finalise the various proposals or suggestions that it wants to place on the table.

On youth mobility more generally, it depends on precisely what you mean by youth mobility. There is the university sector and Erasmus+, but obviously that has financial implications. There is an idea about something wider, but the Government are pledged across the course of the Parliament to bring net migration down, and that is an objective that we are determined to achieve. To your earlier point about youth mobility generally, it is a matter for the EU how it wishes to put that forward and seeks to negotiate it, but we will have to see. There is plenty of speculation in the papers about various things, but we will have to see where they get to.

Baroness Lawlor: It would go in hand with taking net migration down and, given that we have around 300,000 overseas students and their families already here, there would not be an increase to that figure.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: It depends on the nature of the wider proposal. There are so many ways in which this could be put on the table, so we will have to see precisely what they propose. To my earlier point, I am not going to get into an assumption about what the other negotiating partner wishes to put on the table. To the Duke of Wellington's point about the precise nature of the proposal, it is obviously a matter for them to formulate.

Q10 **Baroness Lawlor:** I want to ask about the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill. As you know, Clauses 1 and 2 quite explicitly will enable the UK Government to import, mirror, or otherwise enact EU legislation on products. Many people will be a bit concerned about this, given the problems the EU economy has faced as a result of its product regulation and metrology matters.

May I give you an example? It comes from a study published in 2024 by the ECIPE, which is a European Brussels-based group. For its examples in a study called *Rules Without End*, it took one sector and referred to the areas of data, privacy, e-commerce and consumer protection, which all affect products and the regulation of products in this country. The EU added 830 pages to the rule book; 3,700 restrictions. The Bank of Spain indicated that, for each extra regulatory provision, there was a decline of 0.7% in the sector's employment. These figures are very challenging, along with the fact that the EU economy is projected to grow at less than that of the UK. My question to you is: have you taken account of the cost of these matters, and which particular laws do you envisage mirroring or importing under Clause 1(2) and Clauses 2(7) and (8)?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: That will be a matter for the Secretary of State. You can align or you can diverge. It is a sovereign decision for the UK to make. Your case was about certain areas where there is particular complexity, but that is a judgment for the Government to make. In a particular case, it may be in our national interest to diverge. In another case, it may be that a particular judgment is taken that it is in our interest to align, but the point is that it is our decision to make. If there is a downside to it, it will be for the Secretary of State to take into account in making that decision.

Baroness Lawlor: Do you envisage dynamic alignment, given the large question raised when we were negotiating the TCA as to whether we followed the EU's so-called level playing field rules?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: There are a few different things to unpack there. In terms of level playing field and workers' rights, we are moving very far ahead on workers' rights with our Employment Rights Bill. A level playing field is hugely important, of course, but we are actually enhancing workers' rights here. That is the Government's objective.

In terms of alignment on the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill, it is a matter of choice for the Secretary of State whether they wish to align or diverge.

On a broader question of alignment, I assume you are referring to the sanitary and phytosanitary agreement negotiations. I am not going to get into this, because, frankly, we have to start the negotiation to obtain the granular details of it in terms of alignment. But in terms of this Product Regulation and Metrology Bill, it is a matter for the UK.

Q11 Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Minister Thomas-Symonds, when you were answering Baroness Ashton's question earlier about how these policies are being delivered, you referred specifically to the changes in the machinery of government. Can I take you a little bit deeper into that, away from the vision and to the doing? How and why was that decision made? What do you think you have got out of it? The two of you are here today, and you are working together. How does it specifically work between your departments, the FCDO and the Cabinet Office?

Considering that it is always important to have a woman-focus approach to policy-making as well, particularly across any negotiations with the EU and wider negotiations in Europe itself, which Ministers will you be dealing with? I noticed that on the list of Ministers in the Women and Equalities Unit, they are not all Ministers but, rather, are referred to as spokespeople, which seems a new decision by government to deliver that.

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: First, on the machinery of government change, the idea is to have a central secretariat answerable directly, as I am, to the Prime Minister. So you have the Prime Minister's authority, but you also have the ability from the centre to look across the different aspects of the relationship and, ultimately, as you get further in the negotiation, to be able to make the trade-offs. That is the purpose of it.

The relationship with the FCDO works extremely well. The FCDO remains responsible for bilateral relationships, which Stephen is responsible for in the Foreign Office, and it dovetails extremely well. We are in very close contact, we meet very regularly and we share information from the various meetings that we have. It is working extremely well.

Taking equality into account is hugely important. We will certainly be doing that over the course of the negotiation and the impact of anything that we negotiate.

I will add one other point about the machinery of government, because it is relevant. We are in the process of recruiting a Permanent Secretary who will be based in the Cabinet Office and who will be the EU Sherpa among other things. That is an ongoing process. I am sure Lord Ricketts will appreciate that I am not going to comment too much on it because it is ongoing—that recruitment process is closed to applicants at the moment—but it will be another really important aspect of the machinery for the negotiation.

Stephen Doughty MP: You asked a bit about how it works. The reality is that Nick and I speak every other day. We are read into each other's meetings and regularly meet to discuss strategy and objectives. I can assure you that there is more than enough work to go around on the scale of what we are trying to achieve here. We have known each other a very long time. There is a very strong working relationship between us and our teams. It very much complements the work that the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary are doing, and I saw that the Chancellor was at the Eurogroup the other day.

So this is very much a team effort, which reflects the Prime Minister's objective to work together as a team government delivering those missions. It will require different skills, different expertise, different people attending different meetings and different engagements at different times. We have some established ways of working, which are working very well for us and, likewise, for our teams and officials.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: In that established way of working, where does UKMis lie? Who is responsible for UKMis?

Stephen Doughty MP: We both have a relationship with UKMis, which is delivering on a whole series of objectives. We also have our bilateral embassy in Brussels as well as the NATO delegation. There is often a lot of interaction between the teams and, again, it is quite a natural fit.

I was in UKMis the other day, engaged on the Gibraltar negotiations taking place in the Berlaymont, and Nick is there on a regular basis. The team works to support us all in our objectives in the way that our missions do across the world. They are there as one platform representing His Majesty's Government, and they are delivering multiple functions: diplomatic, serious and organised crime co-operation, economic, trade, security, and defence. The Ambassadors and High Commissioners are directly responsible to the FCDO but, of course, they are representing the whole Government and they act on that basis.

The Chair: That sounds familiar.

Q12 **Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** On the machinery of government, I was reflecting on your answers to Baroness Lawlor about metrology and that it was a decision by the Secretary of State to follow down a route. I want to try to understand better. If you have a collection of Secretaries of State each making their decision separately as to whether they diverge, is there a guiding hand on the principles that

should guide them in doing that? How do you get a coherent UK approach, rather than different departments doing their own thing? How does that happen?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: That is why we have put the creation of the European Union Relations Secretariat at the centre: so that we can look right across the piece which is its whole purpose. To Lord Ricketts' earlier point, that was the purpose of creating the secretariat at the centre.

In addition, as indicated earlier, having the Windsor Framework Taskforce is also really important. As with my relationship with Stephen, I also have a very good relationship with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who obviously remains responsible for managing the politics and political interaction in Northern Ireland. Again, having that Windsor Framework Taskforce in the European Union Relations Secretariat helps with the kind of issues you are referring to in having a consistent approach.

Stephen Doughty MP: Being responsible for the Irish bilateral relationship, we are regularly cited and engaged in discussions, because we have important bilateral equities in a crucial bilateral relationship with the Republic of Ireland. It naturally fits and works together well.

Q13 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Is it fair to say that the detailed work of following divergence and changes happening in Europe is being done at a departmental level, and then you have oversight to make sure that it is coherent? Is it as simple as that?

Nick Thomas–Symonds MP: It is a bit more complicated than that, as most things in life are. You have to ask: what do we mean by the interaction between UK and EU regulations? First, it is how our exporters are navigating the EU when they are exporting into the single market. Secondly, it is about the Windsor Framework and, where there are EU regulations, their implications for Northern Ireland and for the Windsor Framework. Thirdly, the way the EU regulates on things may have a secondary impact on us in any event.

We monitor regulatory developments across government, and you will find that different government departments are engaging with the Commission. Indeed, it is very important and useful in deepening the relationship but, at the same time, the structures of the trade and cooperation agreement are also important. For example, I have addressed the Domestic Advisory Group, both in opposition and in government, but it is also about the EU Relations Secretariat being at the centre, making sure that it is running through the Whitehall process. That will be particularly important.

There is obviously the point about monitoring EU regulations, which was the subject of your question, but that will also become very important in the new year when we get into the negotiations.

Q14 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Ministers, you referred to the components of the third pillar. Have you incorporated the creative arts

into that, which have suffered heavily under some Brexit constraints? I feel very strongly that your eminences of the whole department should look at this very carefully and, in this process, do your very best for the promotion of our creative arts, which are magnificent.

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: They are indeed absolutely magnificent. Our creative arts are a huge source of our soft power around the world. The specific example in the manifesto is touring artists, because there has been an issue with a severe fall-off in the number of touring artists who are going into the EU and vice versa. That is just the example to reassure you that the creative arts are a priority for us.

- Q15 **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** I am not very surprised that two south Welsh people should be working closely together, but I am interested in the third pillar of trade and hope that you are as close to Johnny Reynolds, particularly with what is happening in America. The Business and Trade Department will be focused on UK-American, but there is also the EU-American, so how is the machinery of government actually holding that together?

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: I will tread carefully on referring to details of it, but it is held together by a Europe Cabinet Committee, which is meant to co-ordinate different issues across the piece.

Stephen Doughty MP: I regularly meet with Minister Alexander in DBT to discuss our trade relations, and we have discussed a number of issues, not just our relationship with the EU or the United States but also some of the other negotiations and processes that are involved: the Türkiye, the FTA, where that goes and the possibilities that come from it.

Growth and prosperity is the Prime Minister's top mission, so it is at the top of my list and Nick's list. It is key that we are therefore co-ordinating across departments and understanding how those different processes interact with each other. We are seeking to expand opportunities, and not just on the trading side but, crucially, on the investment side. Our missions play a crucial role, in a number of those relationships, in driving investors into the UK and them seeing that this a good market to put their money in. The promises from the Investment Summit were writ large and showed that it is all a crucial part of each dialogue and engagement that we have.

- Q16 **Baroness Lawlor:** Back to the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill. Given that it is giving powers to the Secretary of State to introduce EU law by statutory instrument, does it bother you, Mr Thomas-Symonds, as Minister for the Constitution, that having gone through that whole business of 2016, the various hold-ups by Parliament, the 2019 election when there was a resounding yes vote to bring back our laws to Westminster, we are now giving the Secretary of State powers to introduce, by the back door, EU legislation, or the rule books, as he or she chooses, and to do so by statutory instrument?

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: It is obviously not by the back door. We are here discussing it quite openly. The point is this: am I comfortable

with that mirroring when it is in the UK's interest to do so? Absolutely. Am I comfortable with diverging when it is in the UK's interest to do so? Absolutely. It is a Parliament that has been elected by the public, so it is the Government who have the mandate. Am I comfortable with the Secretary of State making that judgment about what is in the UK's national interest? Yes, I am.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you very much, Ministers. I should also have welcomed Dame Deborah Bronnert from the Foreign Office and Olaf-Henricson-Bell, now in the Cabinet Office, and to say a word of appreciation for all the support we get from officials.

We are in the process of discussing new scrutiny arrangements to make sure that the Government and Parliament are working effectively together on scrutiny of EU legislation, and we will be looking for help from officials as usual in our next inquiry, which we hope to launch early in the New Year. This has been a very useful evidence session for us in helping to frame that inquiry.

Thank you to both Ministers. We hope very much to see you back again. Perhaps next time we can avoid votes and have even more time, but we covered a lot of ground in a very concise way. I thank you all very much.