



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
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Lord Kinnoull  
House of Lords European Union Committee  
House of Lords  
London  
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Dear Charles,

Thank you for your letter of 24 April. I hope this letter addresses your questions and apologies for the delay in replying.

The Cabinet Office has prioritised work to fulfil its important role in the COVID-19 response. However, activity on implementing the Withdrawal Agreement and preparing for the end of the Transition Period continues. Our position remains that there will be no extension to the Transition Period.

Work on negotiations and preparedness is coordinated by No10 and the Cabinet Office, but takes place in Departments across Government. As an example, in the second negotiating round which took place from 20 to 24 April, 100 UK negotiators from a range of Departments supported the negotiations, taking part in almost 40 different videoconferences.

There is ample time to strike a deal with the EU based on free trade and friendly cooperation. We are largely seeking an agreement like that which the EU has agreed with other sovereign nations, so there are many precedents. As set out in the Political Declaration, the Parties will convene in June to take stock of progress. By that point, we will have had several rounds of discussions, and so we would expect, if the negotiation was productive, to see a broad outline of the deal. If that was not the situation, we would have to consider whether it looked likely that we could reach an agreement in the time remaining.

As to the matter of wider trade negotiations, the UK is fully committed to negotiating comprehensive free trade agreements with the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. We are looking at options to conduct negotiations in an appropriate way given the COVID-19 crisis.

On the issue of Parliamentary scrutiny, I agree it is vital that the Government continues to come under robust scrutiny. I have issued a Written Statement (or written to the chairs of relevant

select committees when Parliament was in recess) after each round of negotiations. I also gave an Oral Statement at the time the approach to negotiations was published and issued a written statement about the approach, which was laid before the House as a command paper. I appeared before the Commons counterpart to your Committee, the Future Relationship with the EU Committee, on 11 March and 27 April, and I look forward to my appearance before your Committee.

As noted in my letter to you of 31 March, we will keep under review whether it is useful to share negotiations documents more widely. I am happy to do the same for Specialised Committee updates, yet do not feel further processes are required at this time for the same reasons I have outlined previously.

You asked about briefings with officials. I am happy to give this further consideration. I would be grateful if you can provide more detail as to what you would seek to gain from such briefings that cannot be achieved through evidence sessions with myself, or correspondence such as this.

As noted in my letter of 31 March, we held a constructive conversation on implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol at the first meeting of the Joint Committee. We formally launched the work of all six Specialised Committees, including the Ireland/Northern Ireland Specialised Committee (INISC). The INISC will be supported by the Joint Consultative Working Group, and will make recommendations to the Joint Committee for decision. As you will be aware, the INISC met for the first time on 30 April via video conference. The UK and EU co-chairs both welcomed the collaborative and constructive conversation. In accordance with the terms of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK shared the provisional agenda on a confidential basis in advance of the meeting. Unfortunately, this was reported on social media. The agenda was formally adopted at the beginning of the meeting.

Our approach will be focused at all times on protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and we are committed to implementing our obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement. However, the EU must recognise its legal obligations too. This includes facilitating trade, respecting Northern Ireland's place in the UK customs territory and, above all, respecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its parts. The Withdrawal Agreement sets out that the Joint Committee must reach a decision on which goods are "at risk" of entering the EU market, and we are committed to taking forward discussions on this issue.

We have already started technical discussions with the Commission, including relating to systems and databases necessary for the smooth functioning of the Protocol. We have also engaged with the Commission around the implementation of the regulatory provisions included in the Protocol, such as the relevant competent authorities in particular areas.

In addition, as I set out to the Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU on 27 April, one area that is particularly important and requires clarity on any changes is the movement of products of animal origin. This is because we want to respect the fact that, as is already the case, the island of Ireland is one epidemiological unit. For those involved in this sector, more work through the Specialised Committee is required to ensure we have the best possible set of arrangements. We want to work with Northern Irish businesses and the Executive to ensure new administrative procedures are streamlined and do not affect the flow of trade.

I am copying my reply to the Leader of the House of Lords, Sir William Cash MP, Chair of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, and the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Chair of the House of Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union.

**With every good wish,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail.

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
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