



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

6th March 2018

Unhelpful Brexit Language

Dear Foreign Secretary,

As an accomplished author yourself, you no doubt understand the importance of language. At a moment when the eyes of the world are on the UK as it undertakes the most important and sensitive negotiations it has participated in for forty years, it is doubly important.

The other Member States of the EU are the UK's closest friends and allies. They are our nearest neighbours, and our most trusted security partners. Most are our NATO allies, and all are our fellow European citizens in tackling global issues such as climate change and poverty. As the Prime Minister herself has said, Brexit would mean the UK leaving the EU, not Europe, and EU Member States collectively and individually will remain central to the prosperity, wellbeing and global influence of the UK after Brexit.

It is therefore gravely worrying that the language used by many senior politicians and much of the press in the UK is not the language of cooperation and respect, but of war and conflict.

Terms such as "war-cabinet", "punishment", "demands", "blackmail" and similar do not promote an image of a deep and special relationship, but a hostile one. In the last week utterly inappropriate terms such as "weaponising", "annexing" and "provocation" have been widely used in relation to the Draft Exit Treaty and its proposed protocol on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Aside from the extremely questionable morality of the use of such terms, they also serve to damage the UK's future prospects greatly. Their use is self-defeating in every respect. The prosperity of the UK will be deeply affected by the Article 50 negotiations, and achieving any outcome that minimises the harm of Brexit requires goodwill, patience and trust on all sides. The use of inflammatory language undermines any efforts to build such trust, and serves to limit EU27 leaders' room for manoeuvre with their own electorates. Concessions and compromises cannot be justified in climate of hostility. Future partnerships are hard to build with those who seek to portray one as the enemy.

At the same time, there is a danger that the rest of the world is being shown a picture of the UK's approach that is not the cooperative and pragmatic one they once knew. Much of the world already sees Brexit as a needless act of self-harm that diminishes the UK's standing in the world. The mantra of a Global Britain rings hollow when it is accompanied by needlessly aggressive language directed at our closest partners.

Finally, this language is dangerous for the UK's own culture and cohesion. For those millions of EU27 citizens in the UK, including the many married to British citizens, and UK Citizens in the EU that are very far from reassured about their futures, this language is genuinely threatening. Many who have made their homes and lives in the UK are already deeply concerned that a hostile environment is developing. Hostile language can only add to the worries and uncertainty for them and for the UK Citizens in the EU27 whose rights are still far from guaranteed.

We, as MEPs representing the UK in the EU, call upon you, Foreign Secretary, to unreservedly condemn this dangerous and harmful use of hostile language, and to ensure that HMG leads by example in de-escalating such rhetoric at every opportunity and in all of it and its ministers' communications.

Copies of this letter will also be sent to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the UK Permanent Representative to the EU.

With assurances of our very highest regards,

Charles Tannock MEP (Conservative),
Alyn Smith MEP (SNP),
Richard Corbett MEP (Labour),
Catherine Bearder MEP (Liberal Democrat),
Molly Scott Cato MEP (Green),
Jill Evans MEP (Plaid Cymru),
Seb Dance MEP (Labour),
Jean Lambert MEP (Green),
Julie Girling MEP (Conservative),
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