

23.02.28

8 Deputy M.B. Andrews of the Minister for External Relations and Financial Services regarding the negotiation of tax and trade agreements (OQ.22/2023)

Will the Minister indicate whether she will be seeking to negotiate tax and trade agreements on behalf of the Island with non-polyarchy states across this 4-year term of office, and if so, why?

Deputy K.L. Moore (The Chief Minister - rapporteur):

As stated in the common policy for External Relations, a priority for Jersey's external engagement is the continuing expansion of our treaty network in areas such as investment, tax and trade. By pursuing a wider set of these agreements with some of our largest trading partners and other high-growth economies around the world, Jersey's position as an international partner of choice is enhanced. The prioritisation of the jurisdictions with whom Jersey negotiates these agreements will continue to be informed by a range of inter-connected factors, including the level of maturity of our existing relationships, the likelihood of being able to secure an agreement if negotiating bilaterally and the prioritisation given to the negotiation by the U.K. when negotiating on behalf of Jersey and the Crown Dependencies. It should also be emphasised that as a Crown Dependency, Jersey's negotiation of international agreements is always done in lockstep with U.K. foreign policy.

3.8.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am tempted to ask if she could just answer the question. Deputy Andrews' question I think was very specific and the point he is clearly trying to get to with the question is whether the issue of democracy in those states is considered and whether there is a preference for doing business with dictatorships versus democracy. Does that feature at all her in thinking on this matter?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I would suggest that I did answer the question and I answered it very clearly. There are always a series of factors to take into account in any such decision and of course we do so while following U.K. foreign policy.

3.8.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

So would therefore this be an accurate way to paraphrase the policy which is that this Government is perfectly content and will be seeking to negotiate tax and trade agreements with countries which are dictatorships with poor human rights' records? I think that can be answered yes or no.

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I would say that would be a no. But of course we are all on our own development journeys and by engaging with other nations and sharing our values and experience, then we can of course always encourage others along their own journeys. As I said in my initial answer, we engage with other nations based on a variety of factors and they are all of importance.

3.8.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I will resist the question of whether everyone Googled “polyarchy”. Can I ask the Minister what, if you like, percentage or what proportion is the importance of democracy in a state for us to be entering into a trade agreement? Is it a major factor or is it a simple, small factor that is there?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Democracy generally of course is of great importance to Jersey as a small Island nation and particularly having been occupied ourselves. We hold a democracy and all that goes with it in high esteem. We, of course, as I said earlier, deal with other nations who are in different stages of their development and we do so on a respectful basis and we always seek to share our values in discussions with them.

3.8.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is there a jurisdiction that we would not enter a treaty with?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think as outlined in the initial question, every decision is taken against a balance of many different factors.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

What are those, can I just confirm?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

It would have to be considered very carefully at the time but I am not aware that there is any state that is out of our remit at the moment. We would of course always follow that U.K. foreign policy and consider that direction.

3.8.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is interesting that we follow U.K. policy when it suits us but other times we seek to break away. Can I ask the Chief Minister: is she comfortable that domestically the Government is, quite rightly, I think, pursuing a policy against violence against women and girls yet they are actively seeking to do business with countries which have a very questionable record when it comes to violence and repression of women, in general?

[10:45]

Could she tell us perhaps how is it that she shares her values when she goes to these dictatorships that oppress the rights of women and minorities and homosexuals? Does she wear, for example, a rainbow lapel badge when she goes there? How exactly in tangible ways does she and her Ministers share Jersey’s liberal values with what are often autocratic dictatorships, if you excuse the tautology?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I thank the Deputy for the question. When Ministers, all Ministers, engage with politicians and other nations we all have interesting discussions and build relationships. Of course there is always talk about our values because they are good opportunities to build those relationships, an understanding of each other's cultures and values. I think the initial part of the question is very important to answer. Of course we take our commitment to our own internal view towards violence against women and girls extremely seriously, and I am very keen to see that that work continues under the current taskforce leadership and we will continue to engage with other nations in our way.

3.8.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Minister give some tangible examples? She does not have to divulge any specific verbatim conversations but some tangible examples of when she or her Ministers have gone into meetings with other Ministers and shared what she would call as Jersey values? For example, does that include going into a meeting at a trade negotiation and opening it by saying: "We are having a gay pride rally in September" or: "We are starting a piece of work to reduce violence against women in Jersey, what are you doing in your country before we sit down and negotiate?" because I simply do not believe that kind of thing happens.

The Bailiff:

Tangible examples, Chief Minister? Was there ...

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I have not yet been in one of those circumstances but I am aware that the Minister for External Relations and Financial Services was recently visiting other nations and they showed a great deal of interest in the fact that we have female leadership in Jersey currently. I think that was very warmly welcomed and I received incredibly positive and encouraging feedback, and I look forward to meeting with those leaders of those other nations in due course.