

2020.06.02

1 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence of the Minister for External Relations regarding an update on Brexit negotiations (OQ.137/2020):

Will the Minister provide the Assembly with an update on progress with Brexit negotiations, highlighting the latest developments that affect Jersey and the other Crown Dependencies?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Minister for External Relations):

It is a pleasure to see you in the virtual Chair this morning. States Members will know that Brexit negotiations have been ongoing despite the COVID-19 crisis. The latest round begins today and I, along with the Chief Ministers of Guernsey and the Isle of Man, met virtually with Cabinet Office Minister, Penny Mordaunt, yesterday to discuss our involvement and ongoing interests. We had a productive discussion and I reiterated our priorities for Jersey which, as I have set out before, include promoting and preserving our constitutional autonomy and economic interests and maintaining the rights and privileges of our residents and businesses to trade and develop our agile economy.

3.1.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I was hoping for something a little more specific from the Minister. Would the Minister be able to say about any particular moves forward in any areas? Is there any certainty as to any element of the negotiations that the Minister has been involved in?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows, and I am sorry if he feels I have not been specific. Oral questions are not necessarily helpful in being detailed nor specific. I am intending to produce another Brexit report by the end of June, which will update Members further. But the sad fact of any negotiation is that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. The Deputy will know from reading the international media that of course there is ... I am not sure whether "stand-off" is the correct word but there is continued positioning by both sides in this negotiation and of course that continued positioning affects any progress that might be made in regard to Jersey's position but we are still being well understood and our position is being acknowledged and maintained in these negotiations.

3.1.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

What is the position on the fishing rights? Is the Minister taking a robust stance over the fishing rights, as opposed to the stance he indicated 2 or 3 months ago?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Perhaps the Deputy would elucidate on the stance she feels I have taken because we have been robust from the start.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

At the briefing it was a somewhat emollient approach to the negotiations as opposed to something rather more robust considering the whole thing is based on an 1843 agreement with the French.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think the Senator is confusing matters. She is referring to the Bay of Granville Agreement, which she will know from media coverage in Jersey that there is some disquiet among the fishing industry about how that agreement is working, and we have continued to speak to the French about that.

There is a belief that there are some abuses taking place on the French side and we are continuing to consider and discuss those matters. The fishing issue with the European Union of course is a wholly different one and we continue to take a robust position with regard to fishing. It came up in the conversation yesterday. Jersey and Guernsey are absolutely aligned in wishing to be able to continue to be masters of our own destiny when it comes to deciding on fishing. Of course, the United Kingdom is also clear on what it wishes to do in regards to fishing and how it becomes a coastal nation state, and therefore for us we have suggested that we do not necessarily want to be dealt with in exactly the same way as the U.K. (United Kingdom), depending on what the deal there is, and we wish to be entrusted to negotiate on our own behalf.

[9:45]

3.1.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Is the Minister satisfied that, given the U.K.'s negotiating stance with the E.U. (European Union) and the apparent impasse that they have reached, Jersey will be able to maintain good neighbourly relation with the E.U. despite the fact that the U.K. is adopting its very difficult stance?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Good question. I think we have, for the last number of years, endeavoured to maintain a good neighbourly relationship independent of the U.K.'s membership of the European Union and I have no doubt that as we continue to do that - it has been difficult of course during the COVID crisis - but officials have maintained good relationships either via virtual meetings or via old-fashioned letter or email correspondence. I have been doing the same with Ministers and officials and European Union ambassadors to the United Kingdom. It will be critical that we do so as the U.K. leaves the European Union because the dynamics of that relationship has changed and therefore it will become more critical that we engage positively with member states, for example in Paris and in Berlin. The Deputy knows of our programme to work through embassies in both Paris and in Berlin and in other European capitals to maintain that positive bilateral relationship.