

James Brokenshire's Speech at the 2017 Conservative Party Conference

Conference, as you've just heard in that typically passionate, powerful and inspiring speech from Ruth Davidson.... as Conservatives we are proud in our United Kingdom and resolute in support of the special bonds that bind us together....

And it is great to have Ruth as leader of the Scottish Conservatives taking the SNP to task and taking that positive message to the people of Scotland.

As Conservatives, we're proud of the values of democracy, justice, freedom of speech, equality and basic fairness that define our Country

Proud in our outward looking approach to the world. Proud of our traditions, our culture, our history and what we have achieved. And steadfast in our belief that our best days lie ahead of us not behind us.

It is this spirit of optimism that guides our vision as Conservatives.

And how our prosperity is enhanced by our precious union of four great nations.

In this party we value the huge contribution that people from Northern Ireland make to all parts of our national life. Business... the arts... science... technology... public service... sport.

Our clear belief is that Northern Ireland's future is best served as part of a stronger United Kingdom... and the United Kingdom is strengthened by Northern Ireland.

So let the message ring out loud and clear from this Conference. In this party and this Government we will never be neutral in expressing our support for the Union.

But we recognise and respect that a significant section of Northern Ireland legitimately aspires to a different constitutional future.

And while all reliable tests of opinion demonstrate overwhelming support for the current constitutional arrangements... we will always abide by the principle of consent and govern in the interests of the whole community.

As our Manifesto made clear... and our commitment to the Stormont House Agreement sets out... we also know that we need to respond to the issues of the past... recognising the pain that many continue to feel... so that Northern Ireland can look to the future.

Upholding the rule of law in ways which are just, fair proportionate and equitable.

And which do not focus unfairly or unjustly on those who served in the security forces whose service, bravery and sacrifice have enabled us to benefit from the peace and stability we enjoy today.

Making the political settlement work remains our overriding priority and I am determined that Northern Ireland will continue to prosper... continue to progress.... and that we build a Northern Ireland that works for everyone.

That's the job we are getting on with and I want to thank my great Ministerial team of Chloe Smith and Nick Bourne, my PPS David Morris and our whip Nigel Adams.

I also want to put on record my appreciation of the work of Andrew Dunlop and that of Kris Hopkins and Oliver Colville. We miss Kris and Oliver from the Commons and want to see them back doing the job they both do so well.

I want to welcome Arlene Foster and her colleagues from the Democratic Unionist Party who are attending our conference this week, as they have before.

We are and will remain two separate parties with our distinctive identities and values. On some issues, we will disagree. But as two parties we are working together at Westminster in the national interest.

Providing the political stability our country needs to respond to some of the most significant challenges and opportunities in a generation...

And standing firm against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party who would lead our country down a path to economic ruin and leave people worse off... just like they always do.

That is what working in the national interest is all about.

Next April will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement.

And next December will see the twenty fifth anniversary of John Major signing the Downing Street Declaration which paved the way for it.

There is no doubt that the 1998 Agreement was an historic landmark in the history of Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Terrorist atrocities ... and the security presence needed to counter them ... are no longer a daily fact of life.

Relations between Northern Ireland and Ireland ... and between the United Kingdom and Ireland ... are stronger than ever.

The Northern Ireland economy is continuing to grow as we Conservatives carry on the job of repairing the UK from the disaster we inherited in 2010 from Labour.

But there is still a long way to go if we are to build the truly enterprise-driven economy that is needed.

So I'm committed to taking forward our manifesto pledges to develop city deals in Northern Ireland... to explore the potential to establish a UK Government hub as part of a move of public bodies out of London...

And to see the devolution of corporation tax ... to enable Northern Ireland to compete for business on a level playing field with Ireland.

But that requires a functioning Executive with stable and sustainable finances.

Sadly, despite our extensive efforts and those of the Irish government ... consistent with the three stranded approach ... Northern Ireland hasn't had a properly functioning devolved government since the start of the year.

As Conservatives we believe in devolution... believe in decisions being made as close to the community as possible... believe in locally elected politicians getting on with the job and being held accountable by a locally elected Assembly.

But if the parties remain unable to find a way through we risk heading down a different path.

Where the UK government will need to provide the necessary political stability and governance... starting with the setting of a budget for Northern Ireland later this month.

Not because we want to... but because we have to.

This isn't what I want to see. It isn't what serves Northern Ireland's interests.

And it doesn't need to happen.

Over the years, the political parties in Northern Ireland have found a way through the issues that have divided them.

They have shown leadership in resolving hugely challenging and sensitive issues.

They have created political stability which has been an example to world.

As President Clinton said to me recently... we just can't go backwards.

So my message to the parties is now is the time to reach agreement.

Now is the time to look beyond the issues that divide you.

Show the resolve you have demonstrated in the past.

And let's get on with delivering the brighter, prosperous Northern Ireland we know can be achieved.

The parties have shown that ability to put difference behind them over Bombardier.

I am deeply disappointed by the initial determination of Boeing's challenge to the sale of C series aircraft.

The support that the UK provided to the Bombardier operation in Belfast was and remains compliant with international requirements.

We will continue to defend UK interests and work with Bombardier to safeguard the jobs and livelihoods of over 4,000 skilled workers and their families in Belfast and across Northern Ireland.

I say to Boeing this case is unjustified and unwarranted.

This action is not what is expected of a long-term partner to the UK.

They need to get round the table and secure a negotiated outcome to this dispute quickly.

We are also determined to secure a prosperous future for our country as we leave the European Union.

And I want to make one thing very clear.

We joined the Common Market in 1973 as one United Kingdom ... and we will leave the European Union in 2019 as one United Kingdom.

That includes leaving the single market and the customs union so that we can strike new trade deals with the rest of the world.

At the same time, we recognise the need to address the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, and Ireland as a member of the EU.

... That the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement is upheld, ... That the Common Travel Area across these islands is maintained ... That the rights of citizens and relations North-South are preserved ... That the border for people, goods and services between Northern Ireland and Ireland remains as seamless and frictionless as possible with no physical infrastructure at the border.

And of course... that there is no border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland or anything that fractures the internal market of the United Kingdom which benefits Northern Ireland hugely.

Significant progress has already been made as shown in Brussels last week.

And with sufficient flexibility and imagination on all sides ... as the EU itself has called for ... we can succeed.

As for Labour... well they seem to think that Northern Ireland should somehow stay within the EU when the UK leaves.

We'll take no lessons from Labour when Northern Ireland matters so much to them, they couldn't even find time to discuss its affairs on their Conference floor last week.

Let nobody be in any doubt as to this Conservative government's commitment to achieving the right outcome for Northern Ireland and the right outcome for the United Kingdom as a whole.

And that could not be more so than on the issues of co-operation on security and public safety.

That matters not just in Northern Ireland, but to the UK as a whole, as events here in Manchester in May tragically underlined.

We stand together with the people of Manchester against those who would seek to divide us.

In Northern Ireland the threat from dissident republican terrorists remains severe ... and as we have seen from their attempts to murder this year they have lethal intent and capability.

In addition, too many communities in Northern Ireland still live in the grip of paramilitary groups ... criminals who use fear and intimidation to exert control to line their own pockets.

Tackling terrorism and paramilitary activity requires a strategic approach which I believe we have in place.

So, as ever, I want to underline our thanks and our strongest possible support to the brave men and women of the Police Service of Northern Ireland who ... along with our other

security agencies ... do such a superb job day in, day out upholding the law and keeping people safe.

In just a few years' time we will mark one hundred years of Northern Ireland. It goes without saying that Northern Ireland's history has often been turbulent.

There have been many tragedies and suffering ... on all sides.

But looking ahead to 2021 I want us to be able to present a modern, inclusive, outward looking Northern Ireland as part of a truly global United Kingdom.

A Northern Ireland that is putting the bitterness of the past behind it ... and is uniting for the common good of everyone who lives there.

A Northern Ireland overcoming its divided past ... and committed to building a united community.

One Northern Ireland in which everyone has a shared interest.

I believe that can be a real possibility. By restoring the institutions. Dealing with the legacy of the past. Strengthening the economy. And making a success of leaving the EU.

Make no mistake.

This Conservative Party and this Conservative team will strive to meet all these objectives.

And as Northern Ireland approaches its centenary... build a stronger and more prosperous future for all.