ANDREW MARR SHOW
1ST JULY 2018
JAMES BROKENSHIRE

AM: Can you remind us, do you know, how many negotiating weeks we have had since Article 50 was triggered?
JB: I’m sure you will tell me there have been quite a few. But obviously -
AM: 65. 65 weeks.
JB: Obviously we’re leading towards the Chequers event on Friday and the White Paper that will follow. Obviously the Prime Minister was in Brussels last week, with some discussions with the European leaders, that will continue this week, but with that continued focus on getting the best deal for our country as we leave the EU.

AM: So 65 negotiating weeks we’ve had so far. How many are left?
JB: Well, I think it’s actually worth highlighting when you highlight the time how so many people have said well, we’re not going to achieve things, we’re not going to do things. Whereas the Prime Minister in December obviously had the communication then, we obviously have the transition deal that’s been landed, and progress that has been made in respect of the withdrawal agreement. Now, obviously we’re looking towards our future partnership, and that’s what this is all about.

AM: You’ve had 65 weeks, you’ve got six weeks left. It’s getting very, very short in terms of time. The Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, said you should have produced this White Paper two years ago. Why couldn’t you?
JB: Well, I know that there is real pressure that is there, that’s why the Prime Minister said last week that we need to intensify, to speed up this process. That’s what we want to do, that’s what the EU wants to do. So it’s about how we set out our detailed
arrangements on the new arrangements for our partnership with the EU, that deep and special partnership the Prime Minister has spoken about in the past. And I remain confident that we will do so.

AM: Is the Cabinet divided?
JB: I think there’s no doubt that there are strong views on either side, and that’s what I would expect as we lead into the discussions on Friday. But equally I remain confident that we will come out from that meeting with that clear direction, the White Paper that will follow, and actually setting out our vision for our future with our EU partners.

AM: Well, let’s look at one really important issue, which is Tory relationships with business. Here are three different versions of business lobbying. Jeremy Hunt says that Airbus comments – he was sitting in that chair a week ago – were completely inappropriate. Boris Johnson used something more direct when he was talking about – he said eff business – I can’t say what the word was – you’re a former business lawyer. Greg Clark said that companies should be listened to with respect. Which of those views represents government policy?
JB: Well, do you know what, what we need to achieve –
AM: No, which of those views –
JB: No, no, our view is that we want to work with business to secure the best arrangements, and therefore, yes it is about listening to business. It is about ensuring that we are getting the right trading arrangements with the EU and with partners outside of the EU as well. And therefore business is a key component to our future prosperity and that’s why we will continue to discuss these issues with them.

AM: So you’re much more on the Greg Clark side, or indeed the Guto Bebb side. I don’t think you saw his comment, your Defence Minister. He said this week, ‘the dismissive attitudes shown
towards our business community by senior Cabinet Ministers is both unworthy and inflammatory.’ And he asks the question, ‘do the leadership aspirations of multimillionaires trump the need to listen to the employers and employees of this country?’ What is your answer to that question?

JB: The need of our country is about creating prosperity, about creating jobs, about creating the most opportunities for the future generation. That will be driven by business, and therefore how we have the trading arrangements for the future – which is precisely about what our partnership will be.

AM: We both know that what they really want out of this is a single market for goods. Are they going to get it?

JB: Well, we don’t believe in being part of the single market, that’s what we will leave –

AM: A single market for goods.

JB: Well, the point is that if you have the single market with all of the issues that that brings with it in terms of freedom of movement, that is precisely what we are leaving, and the Prime Minister’s been very clear on getting back control of our laws and our borders.

AM: A dropped in a definite pronoun there, I said a single market on goods. Is that a goer?

JB: Well, not but –

AM: Said not the single market, a single market.

JB: But the point is that if you talk about the single market you are talking about those other issues too. What we’re talking about is an ambitious free trade agreement with our European partners, with that lack of – flexibility to ensure that we don’t see a hard border in Northern Ireland, that we ensure that we are able to trade internationally and, indeed, that we have that frictionless trade the Prime Minister has spoken about.
AM: This is exactly why so many people get frustrated. I say a single market, you say the and we get very, very much tangled up in the words. Mr Danny Dyer said the following this week, 'who knows about Brexit? No one has got an effing clue what Brexit is. No one knows what it is, it’s like a mad riddle.' What is your message to Danny Dyer this morning?

JB: Well, I’m not going to get engaged directly with Danny Dyer’s quote, but what I can say is that we want that partnership with our EU friends, colleagues and allies both in terms of economics but also in terms of our security too. Something that I’ve worked on for many, many years in government, to ensure that we have that strong protection for all of us. That’s why things like the different information systems that we have with our EU partners matter so much. It doesn’t just actually create the security for us, it creates the security for the EU. So it is about those continuing arrangements both from a security perspective, from those common things that bind us together, as well as clearly on the economics and trade.

AM: Staffing and employment matters to business a great deal as well, and there’s been a story around this week that the government would allow people after we leave the EU, EU citizens, to come to this country more or less as they do now if they have a job offer.

JB: Well, freedom of movement –

AM: Is that true?

JB: Freedom of movement is ending. We will set out our proposals in relation to the continuing immigration issues, in relation to our Immigration Bill. So I think you will have to wait to see our detailed arrangements for the future. But what I am very clear about, in some sense that freedom of movement will continue into the future is not correct.

AM: The government set aside three million pounds for a No Deal plan. How much of that have you spent?
JB: Well, we are preparing for all eventualities. I can’t give you detailed spending to date, but what I can say is that there are preparations, of course, for our future post the EU. We don’t want to see a No Deal, and I believe that that is an option that can be very firmly avoided, which is why Friday matters and getting into those negotiations and getting what we all want, which is that positive deal for the EU, for ourselves and ensuring that we have that stability into the future.

AM: Okay, well let’s stay away from the money in that case. Can I just ask you how many extra customs officials have been hired already for a No Deal scenario?
JB: Well, I can’t, again –
AM: Have any been hired?
JB: Well, I know that the Home Office as well as HMRC and the Treasury are obviously preparing, for example, our new system, which is about how you register your customs declarations, how you ensure that we have the ways of operating. That’s an investment that is really important to deal with the, I suppose, the electronic side of filing things, and actually how this, I think, provides a lot of the solution for dealing with the customs arrangements that will be a point of detailed discussion on Friday.

AM: But if there is no deal, you need bodies on the border. I mean, the Dutch are hiring lots and lots of extra customs officials in case there is no deal. My question’s very simple: Are we?
JB: Well, Andrew –
AM: And the answer is we’re not.
JB: Well, Andrew, you’re trying to obviously paint this worst arrangement in terms of what is achievable, and I firmly believe that we will come out through Friday with that White Paper that will set out our detailed partnership and how we can achieve the relationship with the EU.
AM: Mr Brokenshire, if we do not plan properly and seriously for No Deal then they have us over a barrel. We have to do this planning just to show that we can do it if nothing else.

JB: And you know –

AM: Have we actually got any lorry parks, any new lorry parks prepared at Dover in case there is no deal?

JB: Well, Andrew, we have been in a situation before where we had the problems with the Calais crisis where we have already existing plans that deal with pressures on our Channel ports. So it is that preparation that has already been –

AM: Any new lorry parks at all?

JB: Well, you know, the thing is it’s about scoping and preparation, which we already have done, and how we have regular meetings in government to prepare for all eventualities. That’s the right thing to do, that’s the sensible thing to do, and that’s what we are doing.

AM: Now, you’re in charge of local authorities. Are they planning for No Deal?

JB: Local authorities are clearly preparing. I’ll be at the LGA conference next week and will be sitting down with councils to discuss arrangements with them, ensuring that we have a good dialogue between central government and local government, and therefore ensuring that there is that preparation that is in place. And therefore, you know, changes in law that we know from the Withdrawal Agreement that will be needed. That’s what we’re doing.

AM: So people watching can be absolutely assured that this government has a robust, clear and well-spent plan preparing for No Deal now?

JB: Well, we are preparing for all eventualities. Of course we are, Andrew. But the focus must be actually getting that deal, getting that positive deal for our future.
AM: You won’t get a deal unless you’re prepared for No Deal, and you don’t sound to me like you are prepared for No Deal really.

JB: The Prime Minister has been clear on this, that we do need to ensure that that is there. The point though, is that our focus, our attention, all of that detail and effort must be about getting that deal. That is what is in the best interests of our country. But of course we must be prepared, and we will be.

AM: Theresa May says that she wants to be judged as Prime Minister above all on her house building record, which is your brief, and the first quarter of this year house building fell by eight per cent. Why?

JB: Well, actually if you look at it, Andrew, 1.1 million new homes delivered under this government. We remain on track to deliver the –

AM: But it’s going down at the moment the question is why?

JB: Well, actually if you look at the new starts, that’s going very, very well. Last year we delivered 217,000 new homes. Actually that’s been the best year – only in one other in 30 years was it better – and therefore how we do remain very firmly on track to focus on our ambition of seeing that there are the 250,000 homes per year that we know are needed to deliver for our agenda, but actually the homes for the future.

AM: Your colleague Oliver Letwin suggests that the reason that houses are being released at a rather slow rate at the moment is that house builders are sitting on them to build up their profits for later.

JB: Well, do you know what?

AM: Do you think he’s right.

JB: It is about things like the build-out rate, and Oliver produced his detailed report just from the last week or so, which he will equally follow up in the autumn with some further recommendations. It is about how we ensure speedier build-up, that’s why before the summer I will be producing the new
planning proposals. Yes, to actually have greater transparency, to ensure that we are speeding things up, that on those large sites that we can get actually faster development. That’s what our new planning arrangements will be for the new planning framework that I’ll be publishing before the summer, as well as ensuring that we are using all incentives to see that we get the homes for the future that our country needs, and that firmly remains my focus.

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