

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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DOMINIC RAAB

BREXIT SECRETARY

AM: Why did that summit go so horribly wrong?

DR: Well, actually the October summit went much better than the Salzburg one. There is a huge range of issues –

AM: Not a very high bar.

DR: True. But actually if you look at the substance on the withdrawal agreement and the progress on the future relationship, which we covered to begin with by a political declaration, we've resolved or we're close to resolution of almost all the issues. The one big issue remains this bridge between the end of the implementation period and the future relationship, and I do think if you listen to the mood music that came out of Brussels that actually there's some goodwill and pragmatism on all sides. So we need to see that through.

AM: From the outside it's quite hard to see where the compromise is going to be. Let's talk about the so-called backstop or the insurance policy if we can't get what we want. Now, the British proposal is that all of the UK should stay inside the customs union until we resolve this, but there is a real question of how long. Is it acceptable to you for that to be non time-limited?

DR: Well, look, we're leaving the full membership of the EU through the Article 50 process. It would be rather odd if we ended up in that bridging temporary mechanism without a route out. So it could be time-limited, there could be another mechanism –

AM: An ejector seat, as it were, that we could pull ourselves.

DR: I probably wouldn't call it an ejector seat, but I think there needs to be something which allows us to control how long we're there for. To avoid any sense that we are left indefinitely in a sort of customs union limbo. That wouldn't be acceptable. It will be necessary to deal with the bridging issue.

AM: So we now have to negotiate a mechanism to get out of that as it were. How would it work?

DR: Well, we're open to ideas. There've been various ideas floated around in Brussels at the Council. But frankly, the label that's put on it doesn't really matter; we wouldn't accept anything which carved a line down the Irish Sea that separated Northern Ireland from the economic regime that governs the rest of the UK. As you rightly said, I don't think France would accept it in relation to Corsica, the Spanish in relation to Catalonia, or many other European countries with separatist pressures. It's not a very responsible thing, frankly, to have been suggested. And the second thing is that if it's a bridge and if it's temporary we need to know how it ends.

AM: Exactly. But the problem with that is it can only end when we have a border where the technical answers are all in place and it's a frictionless border, nobody even notices it. And we don't know when that might happen. It could be ten years away. Someone said it could be ten years. So we could be in this limbo for ten years under your plan.

DR: Well, no, I don't think that's true actually. If you look the evidence that Jon Thompson, head of the HMRC gave, he said that we could resolve the issues around the border with no extra infrastructure at the border in Northern Ireland. Technology does have a role to play. I think you're quite right about that, and actually it's something Michel Barnier has said. But what we can't do is allow ourselves to stay indefinitely in that limbo. And I think with goodwill and a bit of oomph on both sides to get this deal over the line, if you think about it, as important as it is, these are the only outstanding issues that really ought to be stumbling blocks. So the good news is actually on the vast range of other issues we're pretty close to getting there.

AM: You talk about oomph and goodwill. President Macron has said – and he's backed up this morning by his Europe Minister – there is no more compromise coming from our side, it is the British who must come up with a new idea on the Irish border. Do we have a new idea?

DR: Well, the EU always say that, it's always our responsibility, and to some degree, as I wrote in my column today for the Sunday Telegraph, I can see the frustration on the EU side because we voted to leave. But equally the response of the EU will define itself in this process as well.

AM: Granted, but do we have a new idea on the Irish border?

DR: We have a range of proposals that are being discussed at technical level. I'm not going to conduct the negotiations publicly. But the key aspects for us – and we're pragmatic about it, we're not ideological – is that there can't be any separation of the economic regime for Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, and we can't be stuck in indefinite limbo. We need to know how we get out and we need to have control over the mechanism.

AM: Very, very clear. So that's the limbo, folks. Let's move to the other thing that emerged during these talks, as if it was a bad smell from the floorboards, this idea of an extended transition period for some months. Where did that come from? Whose idea was it?

DR: I don't think it's a bad smell emerging from the floorboards, Andrew, because actually this was negotiated –

AM: Well, a lot of your MPs seem to think it.

DR: I think they're your words, not anyone else I've heard from. But the point of an implementation period is twofold. One, so there's only one set of rules that change as we leave the EU. Secondly to give businesses the capability to plan it. Now, frankly, if we need a bridge from the end of the implementation period to the future relationship the first thing to say is we ought to crack on getting that future relationship negotiated. That's the number

one thing. But secondly, there does need to be a bridge. I am open-minded about the possibility – and on one's tabled any formal proposals – I'm open-mind about using a short extension of the IP. Let's say three months.

AM: I'm interested, even in your body language here, because you can dangle this idea, then everyone walks away from it. That's why I used the phrase bad smell. I come back. Whose idea was it?

DR: The implementation period's really important. It's something we said at the outset of the negotiations we wanted. If you needed to extend it for three months or so, a short period –

AM: Was it your idea?

DR: No, no it wasn't.

AM: Was it Theresa May's idea?

DR: I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to – it's something that's been raised on the other side by the EU.

AM: So it's their idea?

DR: Well, it's an obvious possible route, as long as it's short, perhaps a few months, and secondly, that we know how we get out of it. And obviously it has to solve the backstop issue so that that falls away then as a possibility.

AM: Okay. Now, you quite rightly jibbed at my expression 'bad smell', that was very rude. Let me remind you what some of your colleagues say about it – they don't say bad smell. Iain Duncan Smith says, 'this is not a negotiation, it's a capitulation.' Nick Boles, on the other side of the party, says it's madness. Priti Patel says it's incredibly alarming. Owen Paterson recoils in horror from it. And Johnny Mercer uses a word which we will not use on Sunday morning television. They absolutely loathe this idea because it means paying in more money still. Do you know how much more money we would be talking about?

DR: Well, it would depend on the length. But that's why, as I said, it would need to be very short, a matter of a few months. But I

think the frustration that people feel, and it's natural in the end game of a negotiation, is there's various titbits leaked to media or whatever else, and we're very keen not to conduct the negotiation in public because that's not professional. And I think when people see the whole package, if, as I'm confident, we can still get it and deliver it, I think actually it will provide a lot of reassurance and we're nearly there.

AM: Let's talk about the whole package then, including the financial relationship. When MPs see that and they get a chance to vote, if they do, if it comes back, will that be detailed?

DR: Yes.

AM: In terms of our future relationship. They'll be able to see what our future relationship will look like?

DR: Yes. I don't think we should and could – and I think this is shared on the other side by the EU – go in with huge areas of fudge or lack of clarity about the basic model for the economic partnership and also for security. What it should read as is as direction to both sides during the implementation period to go on and negotiate, put flesh on the bones.

AM: So it's direction. This new declaration, will it be legally binding though?

DR: Well, by definition a political declaration is not. But what we have –

AM: So MPs are still buying a pig in a poke?

DR: Let me finish the answer. But what we will have, and it's agreed as a matter of principle in the withdrawal agreement, is a linkage text so that there is a legal obligation on both sides to proceed swiftly in good faith and get that treaty done. Because actually not only is that in both sides' interest economically, in terms of security cooperation, it's also the answer, the sustainable answer to the Northern Ireland question.

AM: There's a lot of controversy at the moment, as you know, about what kind of vote MPs get when this comes back. Will they get a meaningful vote?

DR: Yes, absolutely, there'll be a very clear choice, an unequivocal decision between the deal that we negotiate, that I'm confident we can, and bring and show to Parliament, and the possibility of no deal, yes.

AM: For a lot of MPs that is not a meaningful vote, because that is our way or the highway, it's like it or lump it. What they want is a vote that can be amended, so they can put down alternatives and discuss them properly.

DR: Well the motion can be amended. That's very clear and that's not for the government to decide. But you couldn't at the end of a negotiation process think about it seriously and credibly, have a situation where we've negotiated the best deal we can with the EU and then we go back and say actually we need a bit more. And for those that say, well actually we haven't had a say on the negotiating mandate, we had eleven votes in the House of Commons on customs union, single market and all the rest. The government won each and every one of those. So there was a moment for that debate, but now –

AM: It's passed.

DR: Well, at the end stage of the negotiation you can't come back with the best deal, a few MPs or a majority of MPs say we don't like it, and think we could go back to Brussels and get better terms. That's just not credible.

AM: So this is coming back to the role of parliament. Jeremy Corbyn says this is an absolute outrage. What you're doing. 'Supreme arrogance' is his phrase.

DR: Look, you heard from Keir Starmer and they can't answer any serious questions on the referendum. They say that they would vote against any deal we bring back outside of the customs union. That must be an irresponsible thing for the Labour leadership to

be saying. And I'm sure many of their backbench MPs will feel very nervous about that indeed.

AM: Well, let me come back to the big picture relationship, because at the moment we're still talking about the common rulebook, and there are suggestions that in Berlin and Brussels and Paris that may be acceptable to them if we go a little bit further in our commitments on standards and regulations and so forth. That's one way forward. The other way forward, which lots of your colleagues prefer, is the so-called Canada deal, a general free trade deal like Canada got. Is it not now time to start to look towards that latter alternative rather than focus on what we've talking about in the past?

DR: Well, we've made good progress in the negotiations on all of these, but I'm not going to conduct them in public, even on your show, Andrew. But what I can say, and I think this is really important, what the EU can't have is the benefits of all those level playing field commitments and the alignment on goods and agrifood which is so contentious here at home unless they're willing to give the frictionless trade that we want for our manufacturers and our supply chains. So there is a question here for the EU about what they want and what they will get. What they can't do is cherry pick from Chequers.

AM: When are you next going to Brussels?

DR: I'm not quite sure, but sooner rather than later.

AM: This week perhaps?

DR: We're making progress day by day, so I can't give you a firm idea.

AM: And in your bowels, do you expect, do you hope for a November summit?

DR: Look, I'm confident we can get a deal, and equally I think we need to have done it by towards the end of November, because of just the – I think for the EU side as well, but for the UK the

practical timings on getting our legislation through. There's every reason we can do this deal. There's pragmatism and goodwill on both sides. What we're not going to do - and I think this is an important point to make, Andrew - we made concessions, we've made compromises. There does come a point where you can be compromised yourselves by the compromises you make and that's why this issue -

AM: Are we really at that point, do you think?

DR: Well, I think we're close. And that's why we have to be very clear that Northern Ireland cannot be separated from the rest of the UK in customs or regulatory terms. And we cannot have a situation where we're stuck in an indefinite limbo.

AM: So those are Dominic Raab's red lines really.

DR: No, they're the government's red lines and the Cabinet's.

AM: All right, now Theresa May, if you look at the papers today seems to be hanging by a thread. She's always hanging by a thread, it's a familiar thread. She's come to quite like her thread, but she's still hanging by it.

DR: Pretty strong thread, because we seem to discuss this each week.

AM: Well we'll see, we'll see. It may be fraying a little bit this week. Lots of colleagues are writing in letters apparently to the Chief Whip.

DR: But you hear that every week.

AM: Every week. I know, I know, on it goes. Amanda Platell who's got her ear to the ground says the atmosphere, the temperature is different this week. What is your message to all of your colleagues who look at this and say it's just a complete shambles, it's time to change the top team?

DR: We're at the end stage of the negotiation. I think it's understandable that there are jitters on all sides of this debate. We need to hold our nerve. The end is in sight in terms of a good

deal, the prize we want, a good deal with the EU and I think colleagues should wait and see what that looks like. Won't be a question of a fait accompli. They'll have their full say over it. That's what the meaningful vote's all about. We won't want to bring something back which we aren't confident is a very good deal for the United Kingdom. And now is the time for the play for the team. I think that's the way we get the best deal from the EU and I also think that's what the country expects from us.

AM: And you're not going to run this right up to Christmas, are you? I mean the real deadline is going to be November. We're not going to have a last minute vote on the last minute deal just before Christmas, atmosphere of crisis, government Whips beating people up as they're dragged into the lobbies? It's going to be done properly and decently?

DR: Oh it has to be done properly and decently and professionally and the best way you get reasonable colleagues is by treating them reasonably, talking to them reasonably and also I think –  
AM: So by the end of November is a reasonable time to be thinking about this?

DR: I think if it went any distance beyond that we'd have a problem with implementing the deal and it would almost be the worst case scenario, we had a deal but we couldn't implement it in time.

AM: Do you believe the Saudi government's explanation of how Mr Khashoggi died?

DR: No, I don't think it's credible. I think it's a terrible case. I think we support the Turkish investigation into it and the British government wants to see people held to account for that death and it's awful.

AM: So given that many British jobs depend upon Saudi contracts and so on what do we actually do now?

DR: Well the first thing is we support the investigation to see what the facts are because I think there is a serious question mark over the account that's been given. We continue to work with all of our international partners on this, but you're right to say we're not throwing our hands in the air and terminating a relationship with Saudi Arabia, not just because of the huge number of British jobs that depends on it, but also because if you exert influence over your partners you need to be able to talk to them.

AM: See Labour says you are too slow and you should have banned arms sales by now.

DR: Well we've got one of the most rigorous export regimes in the world which makes sure arms are very carefully monitored, but the problem with Labour's position is actually it would cost thousands of British jobs. So what we would rather do is support the investigation, find out what happened, make sure there's some accountability –

AM: If you don't believe them we've got to do something about this, even if it's only expelling diplomats as we did in the Skripal case with the Russians.

DR: Well no, I think we need to have a slightly more focused approach than just do anything, do something, but the number one thing at the moment is to support the investigation to make sure we know the full facts, because until you know the full facts you can't work out what you do about it.

AM: You don't believe them. I come back to you and say what do we actually do?

DR: Say again?

AM: What do we actually do?

DR: Well we need to get the answers, some facts here as to what actually happened and then I think we can take a sensible and sober judgement call.

Ends