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FALK AUDITORIUM

ON THE BRINK OF BREXIT:
THE UNITED KINGDOM, IRELAND, AND EUROPE

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Introduction:

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Panel Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WRIGHT: Great, a full house, I see. It's great to welcome everyone here today. My name is Tom Wright. I'm director of the Center on the United States and Europe here at Brookings. I'm delighted to welcome you all here today whether you are in the audience, joining us via webcast, or watching on C-SPAN for our panel discussion, "On the Brink of Brexit: The United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Future of Europe."

Let me take a moment to thank the partnership that we have and to acknowledge the Robert Bosch Stiftung. This is part of our BBTI, our Brookings-Bosch Transatlantic Initiative. We're able to do things here on Europe at Brookings that simply would not be possible without the support and partnership we have with Bosch and we're very grateful. And we look forward to the work to do in the coming years on Brexit and on other issues.

If you'd indulge me for one brief moment I'd just like to make a thoughts to frame the conversation that Ed Luce will moderate shortly. Britain's pending exit from the EU, whether one agrees with it or not, will shape the future of the U.K., the future of Europe, but also the future of the transatlantic relationship. My colleague Amanda Sloat, who is on today's panel, has an important new report in which she documents that Brexit may have a detrimental impact on the Good Friday Agreement and peace in Northern Ireland and also put pressure on devolution with Scotland. And we look forward to hearing her thoughts on that.

Brexit, of course, will transform the European Union, raising major questions about the future relationship of the Continent to Britain, but also about the future direction of European immigration, which is something we're going to look at in coming months. And already we're seeing stark divisions within the EU 27 and how far and how fast the process of Brexit should proceed.

But Brexit will also have an important impact on the transatlantic relationship. While most Americans are very familiar with the term “Brexit,” it’s one of those that really penetrated immediately into the public consciousness, remarkably the United States has been very absent from the negotiations, which marked a departure perhaps from America’s traditional role as an active participant in debates around Europe’s future. And while Brexit is primarily a matter for the U.K. and the EU 27, it does impact on vital U.S. interests. And toward that end, here at Brookings we’re committed to engaging on these issues, including launching a project on the future of the special relationship over the next 12 months and how that special relationship will fit into the broader transatlantic relationship after Brexit.

We’re delighted today to be joined by a really stellar panel. Edward Luce is U.S. national affairs editor of the *Financial Times* and columnist with that newspaper. And he is also author of *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*, which is available on Amazon and all good bookshops. I highly recommend it. Ed will moderate the panel.

Sir Kim Darroch is the United Kingdom’s ambassador to the United States. Ambassador, thank you very much for joining us here today.

Amanda Sloat is one of our Robert Bosch senior fellows here at Brookings and author of the new report that I mentioned, “Divided Kingdom: How Brexit is Remaking the United Kingdom’s Constitutional Order.”

Lucinda Creighton is CEO of Vulcan Consulting and served in the Irish government as minister for European Affairs.

And Douglas Alexander is a senior fellow at Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. And he formerly served as minister for Europe and secretary of state for Scotland in the British government.

I would also like to recognize Dan Mulhall, the Irish ambassador, who’s

here with us today.

And it just remains for me to say please feel free to use your phones if you're Tweeting about today's event. The hashtag is #BBTI, the Brookings-Bosch Transatlantic Initiative.

And with that, Ed, over to you.

MR. LUCE: Thank you very much, Tom. It's a pleasure, as always, to be here at Brookings and to see so many familiar faces, so thank you for having me. It's a pleasure, also, to have such a well-qualified panel and diverse panel to discuss this imminent, on-the-brink issue that we're all facing.

Just to remind you, for those who are not *au courant*, we've got Halloween approaching next week. And sure enough, Theresa May at the same time, it's very close to midnight, late-night sessions in Brussels, trying to negotiate something approximating her Chequers deal with the Europeans to accept her Chequers deal for Britain's divorce agreement, which has to happen by March the 29th under Article 50 and which includes three things.

One, what happens to Europeans living in Britain and Britons living in Europe, which has pretty much been resolved.

Two, the money, which has also pretty much been resolved.

And three, which is unresolved and which we're going to focus on a lot today is not wrecking the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland. In other words, keeping the Irish Republic's border open with Northern Ireland. And we're going to focus a lot on that today.

But the sort of key thing here, though, is Britain's trick-or-treating is not going to result in Britain getting any candy. It's going to be giving candy to Brussels. The question is how much and with what degree of bad will?

So we've got a very diverse range of scenarios on offer. People talk about radical certainty nowadays in geopolitics, which is very much true globally, but the radical uncertainty in the coming months and weeks of what's going to happen with Brexit is really very, very acute. It's as plausible that Britain crashes out in a no deal Brexit next March, Theresa May having failed to secure a divorce agreement, or having succeeded and Parliament having voted it down. As it is, I think after last Saturday's 700,000-strong march in London for a people's vote that there is a second referendum. And then the third ordinarily mainstream scenario that Theresa May gets her deal, Parliament agrees, and then we go to Brexit on March the 29th, after which the real negotiations begin. This is just the straight clearing on what a post-Brexit Britain and Europe looks like.

So let's start with the radical uncertainty. So, Kim, you have been --

SIR DARROCH: Oh. (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: I'm going to you not to persecute you, but because you've been Britain's ambassador to the EU. You were national security advisor to the British prime minister and you're now, of course, Britain's ambassador here in the United States. You have deep experience of representing the British government and speaking on its behalf.

What is your prognosis of these three scenarios: the slightly apocalyptic no-deal scenario, the May gets it all done and squeaks it through Parliament scenario, and the until recently fantastical people's vote scenario, but perhaps slightly less fantastical now? What are you looking at as the probabilities here?

SIR DARROCH: Well, Ed, thanks for that colorful introduction.

(Laughter) And thanks for coming to me first. And you have presented what feels rather like one of those Foreign Office submissions with three options for ministers where we want to choose the middle one. So I'm going to choose the middle one, but let me

explain why.

The withdrawal agreement, which is the agreement between the EU and the 27, which covers all of our leaving arrangements is, as the prime minister said in the House of Commons yesterday, 95 percent done. And we have provisional agreements on money, on the rights of EU citizens living in the U.K. and the rights of U.K. citizens living in Europe, and most of the rest of the leaving arrangements.

The hardest part was always going to be around the deal on what happens on the Irish border, and so it is proving. But let's remember we have got 95 percent of the way there. If we get the free trade deal that is embodied in the Chequers proposal, of course, there isn't really an issue over the Irish border. That gets solved, and that is Plan A. So the debate is about a backstop arrangement if that negotiation should not be completed in the implementation period, the transitional period, that runs until the end of December 2020. And that's not where we expect to be or want to be. So we're talking about a contingency that we hope never happens.

Now, we still have some time. There's another European Council in December. It's still possible there could be an extra European Council at some point in November. We all of us want the same objective -- the Commission, the British government, the Irish government, and the other member states -- which is no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. So I am confident that we can get there and get a deal.

Then you also need to do a political agreement about the future. I did maybe 30 or 40 big European negotiations in my time doing this work, my 50 years doing this work. I'm confident that is achievable with the usual creativity that the specialists and the technicians bring to drafting political agreements. So I'm relatively confident about getting the deal with our European partners.

I would accept that it looks quite a tight vote in the House of Commons when you bring that agreement to the House of Commons. But I think there's a lot of talk now which is in the newspapers and usually unnamed MPs who are saying they won't be able to vote for it. I think when there is a text for them to look at and when they consider the alternatives that will concentrate minds. And I think that the government has the Whip's office machinery and can encourage its MPs to support. It can do deals with other groups. So my money is on her, despite all the predictions at the moment, getting the deal through the House of Commons, getting to that place.

MR. LUCE: Thank you. I was just going to say just very briefly because I want to move to Lucinda. We hope for the best, but we prepare for the worst. To what degree is sort of contingency no-deal planning happening in the British government?

SIR DARROCH: As the government has said, there is contingency planning going on in Whitehall. I know that our colleagues back in Whitehall are looking at all of this. I mean, we're also trying to find a way through that involves a deal, not no deal, so there's quite a lot going on in Whitehall. But yes, we are doing contingency planning for that, but it is absolutely not the expectation and not the plan. The plan is that we get to a deal with our European colleagues in the next month and a half and that we then get that deal through the House of Commons.

MR. LUCE: Lucinda, your political career has been very much engaged with Europe, but also, of course, Ireland, and it's spanned the sort of integration of Europe. You were Ireland's minister for Europe. You were a member of the European Parliament. You've dealt with the Irish presidency of the European Union. So you're steeped in this stuff. That same time period there's also been the entrenchment and the success of the Good Friday Agreement that has achieved peace in Ireland.

How fearful are you that that is now in jeopardy? To what degree is your

no-deal contingency plan in Ireland now a sort of live activity?

MS. CREIGHTON: So I think the risks surrounding this final phase of the negotiations are very high. There is a huge degree of concern in Dublin and in Belfast and across the island around the prospect of a deal not being concluded. I think it probably will. I spent a lot of my time in Brussels and I think there's a real desire. I also spent a lot of my time in London and I think there is a desire on both parts, on both sides to do a deal. So I agree with Kim on that.

But I think the arithmetic in the House of Commons, and I'm sure Douglas will talk about this from his direct experience of being a member of the Parliament, Westminster, I think it's a highly risky scenario. So there is a lot of planning across government departments in Dublin. It's a difficult thing to plan for, so there's a lot of sort theoretical planning underway, and I think the implementation of that is very unclear. And I think that there is a legitimate and a really deep emotional concern in Ireland around the political future on the island.

You know, it's a very sensitive topic in London and those who advocate for Brexit and even possibly for no deal really don't like the issue of the peace process in Northern Ireland to be raised at all. They think it's scaremongering and fearmongering. And they were really angry when Leo Varadkar, our Taoiseach prime minister, raised it at the European Council last week, but he was right to raise it. Because, you know, peace is hard-won and it's very fragile and it's very easily lost.

And I concluded my high school exams, the Leaving Cert, in 1998. And so I come from that generation which through our childhood witnessed on our televisions every single evening bombs not just in Northern Ireland, by the way, but also in Britain, which devastated people's lives. Thousands of people killed. And that is something that the people across island of Ireland are deeply concerned about maintaining and

preserving the peace process and we don't take it for granted. And we are really concerned about what a no-deal scenario could potentially unleash if there isn't agreement before March and probably by the end of this year.

So this is a real risk, a real threat, and something that Irish people are really concerned about.

MR. LUCE: Douglas, you're steeped in British politics. You were minister for Europe in the last Labour government. You were secretary of state for Scotland, which, of course, we're going to bring into this conversation, too. And you were opposition spokesman, shadow spokesman, on foreign affairs.

MR. ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MR. LUCE: Given your parliamentary experience, you're now at Harvard, of course, which is not where most left-behinds are (Laughter), but you're still in a poll position to observe and with your experience judge the prospects here. Given your parliamentary experience and given the leadership of your party, Jeremy Corbyn is at best a lukewarm pro-European, but somebody who didn't turn up to the march last Saturday, what are the chances something could go wrong in this vote and we could crash into a hard no-deal situation?

MR. ALEXANDER: Well, I think the risks are very real and the jeopardy is very great. There is, of course, a negotiating risk. Can the two sides find common ground on the issue of the backstop? There was agreement on that, the December Council in 2017. But the smartest minds in London, in Dublin, and in Brussels so far have not managed to find a formulation.

But in classic negotiation theory both sides want to find that common ground. And the consequences of not finding that common ground, for all the reasons we've just heard from Lucinda, are extremely severe. So my hope would be that in the

immediate days and weeks ahead we will see progress in relation to the negotiations.

But in December of 2017, there wasn't simply agreement reached on the Irish backstop. There was also an undertaking given by Theresa May under pressure from her own back-benchers in the House of Commons that there would be a meaningful vote on the outcome of the negotiations. And so I think we need to countenance not just the negotiation risk, but a ratification risk. And the reason that there is such febrile speculation across the United Kingdom at the moment is there is no majority in Parliament for any of the negotiation outcomes that are under contemplation.

And while I admire Kim's characteristic British understatement and calm under fire in suggesting that this will all be resolved, I have to say, as we say in Scotland, "*A hae ma doots.*" (Laughter) "I have my doubts" is because it seems to me that the Democratic Unionist Party may well not support their partners in the Conservative Party when it comes to this issue of the character of the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

There are a whole number of Conservative MPs who have already declared that they're not prepared to support the deal as it's under contemplation. And so the working assumption in Downing Street right now seems to be that the Labour Party will step in and save Theresa May. And I have to say I am deeply, deeply skeptical that you will see anything like the number of Labour MPs that the Conservative Whip's office are presuming would support Theresa May in those circumstances, actually tripping through the division lobbies. And in that sense I think even if we were to see a breakthrough in the negotiations between the United Kingdom and Brussels in the coming weeks, then the drama moves to the House of Commons and at the moment I don't see that there is a parliamentary majority for any of the proposals that are actually on the table.

MR. LUCE: And we should mention, I should add on to your complement to Kim's wonderful diplomatic poker face that shortly after Trump was elected, he Tweeted that Nigel Farage should be the new ambassador. (Laughter) But nobody in London even heard this or read this Tweet. Marvelous *sangfroid* there.

Amanda, I want to get into the constitutional and devolution to the questions that are implied by this, but let's just start on the immediate what the DUP, the Democratic Unionist Party, which, of course, props up the Theresa May government -- without them, there's no majority -- what their concerns are with the Chequers plan and with the border agreement, with the implications for keeping an open border implied by the Chequers plan. What is the DUP concern there? And why is this such a theological issue for conservative Brexiteers?

MS. SLOAT: It really has been a perfect storm of events. I mean, you remember that Theresa May became prime minister following the resignation of David Cameron after the Brexit referendum. A year in she decided to hold snap elections as a way of strengthening her negotiating position going into Brexit and had a disastrous result, losing her parliamentary majority and then becoming dependent on the DUP for government.

At the same time, it's also worth noting that Northern Ireland has been without an Assembly for over 500 days. So at this critical time when we're discussing Northern Ireland's future, the only voice that's coming out is the voice of the Democratic Unionist Party, which is propping up Theresa May's government in London, and there really is no voice otherwise coming out of Belfast.

When I was in Northern Ireland in May doing research on this report, I met with a DUP representative who had been very senior and involved in these campaigns. And the way he articulated it was that the DUP recognizes that Northern

Ireland has special circumstances, but they don't want Northern Ireland to be given a special status. And what the DUP has always been very concerned about with the backstop is the idea that you would essentially create a border in the Irish Sea and that you would be treating Northern Ireland separately from the rest of Great Britain.

In many ways, what's offered in the backstop would be the best of both worlds economically for Northern Ireland because they would be able to still participate within the EU single market and customs union, but they would be operating within the U.K. framework. For the DUP, this raises very unacceptable status issues for them in terms of the larger constitutional situation within the United Kingdom and, therefore, has become an anathema to their political position.

MR. LUCE: And you as an American, you're the only non-European on this, how do you assess the Trump administration's role in all of this? Because Tom was mentioning earlier in the introduction that a traditional American administration would be trying to finesse and help, sort of insert itself constructively into these divorce negotiations. That's not happening, though, is it?

MS. SLOAT: No, it's not. I mean, it's been unclear in some ways what the U.S. position actually is. You had President Obama, who, of course, was very forward-leaning in terms of supporting Remain. He went to London several months before the Brexit referendum, expressed American support for a strong U.K. within a strong EU; suggested that the U.K. would be at the back of the queue in terms of free trade negotiations with the U.S. if it went forward with Brexit.

Trump has taken a very different approach. He called Brexit a great thing. He has referred to the EU as a foe and I think in its worse case is actually supportive of the weakening of the EU and potentially breaking countries away from the EU.

It's been surprising that the U.S. has not been more involved in these negotiations on the face of it, particularly on the Northern Ireland side. The U.S., of course, for decades supported the Northern Ireland peace process. We had Majority Leader George Mitchell very actively involved in shepherding the Good Friday Agreements. But I think the U.S. really has not played a very active role.

I think the U.S. Government has assessed that it is not in its interest to have the U.K. crash out with no deal. That would be very damaging in NGO economic terms. The State Department has made quiet démarches at various periods in the process to encourage progress towards a deal, but the U.S. really has not played the role that we might see from some traditional U.S. administrations in terms of putting pressure on both sides and, in particular, trying to find a way forward on Northern Ireland.

MR. LUCE: Of course, I should mention it's not just Kim. His job was voluntarily gumped by Trump. But when Trump was in Britain he suggested Boris Johnson would make a great prime minister. (Laughter) So he's got a habit here.

Kim, I'm not going to ask you about --

SIR DARROCH: Another great intro. (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: -- either of those questions. Kim, one of the sort of great claims of the Brexit campaign and the Brexiteers was a post-Brexit U.K.-U.S. trade deal, big free trade agreement between the U.S. and the U.K. Clearly, Britain wouldn't be in the position to negotiate this and America wouldn't want to negotiate this until we knew the arrangement post-Brexit, we knew exactly.

Trump did say one reasonable thing when he was in Britain about this, which was if Britain is de facto in the customs union -- not formally, but de facto -- in order to keep the Irish border open, then it's going to be very hard to negotiate with Britain a separate trade deal. That was a pretty reasonable point, right?

What are the prospects for, assuming Chequers is the basis for the divorce agreement, what are the prospects, therefore, for the great price, supposed price of Brexit, namely a trade deal with America?

SIR DARROCH: The Prime Minister and the President have talked about this at each of the last several meetings, and I attended most recently in New York about three or four weeks ago. And we are keen on a free trade agreement and the President always says, consistently, how keen he and his administration are on it and how they will be ready to start negotiating just as soon as we are. We have this implementation period running from 29 March 2019 to 31 December 2020 in which we can negotiate, I think we can even sign. The only thing you can't do in that period is actually implement the agreements. You can't implement until we have left everything at the end of December 2020.

We've set up a trade investment working group, which has met four times, and Bob Lighthizer and Liam Fox. And that is the structure in which we will negotiate it when it happens. So everything is ready to go and I'm confident once we have left on 29 March that we will start those negotiations quickly.

The scoop of the negotiations, you're right, Ed, and just how far we can go in terms of what freedom we have to set our own tariff levels and so on, we all have to wait and see. We'll have to wait and see where we get to in terms of the future relationship between the U.K. and the EU and the free trade deal we want there and how close we are to EU regulation and so on.

But political will is there. U.S. takes 20 percent of British exports, so it's already our biggest single financial trading partner. There is huge potential for a lot more, including particularly in the whole services sector. So this will be a top priority for the government once we're out.

MR. LUCE: And Lucinda, I'll get to you in a moment, but, Douglas, I mean, is it fair to say that if we did get into the position where technically the U.S. and the U.K. could start a big trade deal that that would be an ideal Trumpian position, which is we're bigger, you're smaller? It would be Britain playing Ireland to Trump's Britain.

MR. ALEXANDER: I find myself having to disagree with Kim, not because he hasn't eloquently described the position of the government, but the position of the government is a post-imperial fantasy. You know, let's be clear, I was the trade investment and foreign affairs minister in a previous British government, and the idea that Donald Trump is willing and waiting to do an ultra generous deal with the United Kingdom seems to me to be optimistic to put it at its most generous.

The fact is trade negotiators are pretty unsentimental people. It comes down to arithmetic and psychology. And if you look at the arithmetic, if you're sitting as a trade negotiator with 500 million citizens behind you, as we do at the moment as part of the EU 28, then the deal that you're able to strike is fundamentally different than if you're sitting with 65 or 70 million consumers behind you.

And at the same time, we're dealing with a president who got elected on a promise of putting America first. So the idea that he is for reasons of sentiment, historic reasons of the special relationship, desperate to do a deal that helps the United Kingdom seems to me to be consistent with a view that's been really there from the outset from the Brexiteers, which is that somehow by leaving the European Union Britain will stand taller in Washington or in Beijing or in Moscow and that we will somehow become a kind of buccaneering North Atlantic Singapore, and to my mind there really is literally no evidence to that effect.

Incidentally, even on the so-called implementation period, the implementation period in reality is going to be a period during which a political declaration

is translated into a legally binding treaty between the United Kingdom and the 27. No serious country is going to engage in a meaningful way in trade negotiations with the United Kingdom until they know the character of the United Kingdom's relationship in terms of future trade with the EU 27 on our doorstep.

So I think the idea that immediately at the beginning of April, if we are in that scenario, that the rest of the world is going to rush to Britain's door to sign free trade agreements is just another iteration of the conversation I'm afraid we were hearing from the Brexiteers two years ago, that as soon as Brexit happened there was going to be a gathering rush of countries to do trade deals with the United Kingdom. As a citizen of the United Kingdom I might wish that was true, but I see perilous little evidence that it's going to be true.

MR. LUCE: Let me just pick up on that fantasy theme. (Laughter) Because, I mean, that's a fantasy that one can laugh at because it's not yet got real-world implications. This deal could involve all kinds of unpopular things in Britain, like having to eat imported chlorinated chicken.

MS. SLOAT: I was going to say all you have to do is say "chlorinated chicken" and Brits shudder.

MR. LUCE: Yes. And opening the National Health Service up to --

SIR DARROCH: Privatizing the National Health Service, yeah.

MS. SLOAT: GMO foods.

MR. LUCE: And GMO foods, exactly. Exactly. But the fantasy theme has also extended to Ireland. I mean, you've had very senior British conservative politicians, like Jacob Rees-Mogg, Boris Johnson of course, Michael Gove to some extent, talking in a very sort of slapdash fashion about what Ireland could do to accommodate itself to Britain's decision.

Rees-Mogg said the other day, well, we can have people on the borders checking people who cross the borders, like we had during the Troubles. Boris Johnson has talked of computers solving it all, that you don't need any sort of checks on the border. We can actually crash out entirely of the customs union and keep that.

How is this kind of -- and, of course, we've had the Brexit talk. Well, you should leave the EU, too, and just come in with us and our own customs union, which we would call the British Isles. (Laughter)

MS. SLOAT: I think we've heard that one before. (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: We've heard that one before. You've seen this movie before and you're sitting in a way more comfortable seat now, so you're a much more secure country. Nevertheless, to what degree is this sort of bringing rather bad memories and changing the political climate in the Republic?

MS. CREIGHTON: It's a very big question in a sense. I mean, on the one hand, the relationship has clearly deteriorated in the last couple of years, really since June 2016. You know, we had a high point in bilateral relations when Queen Elizabeth visited in 2011 and came to Ireland and traveled around the country. And there was a really strong bilateral relationship and personal relationships, as well, between the various Taoiseach and a series of prime ministers. And certainly, those relationships have been strained in the last two years. And, of course, offense is taken by some of the remarks from some cabinet members and some leading lights within the Conservative Party.

However, I would say I think we've gotten to the point in Ireland where we're actually a little bit desensitized to some of the nonsense coming from some of those people. So, you know, when Boris Johnson's father intervenes and says, well, if Irish people want to shoot at each other, that's fine, at this point I don't think anybody's

taking that sort of nonsense seriously.

And likewise, when, you know -- and Boris Johnson wasn't the only one to talk about technical solutions to the border question. I mean, that was a very serious line of thought within the Conservative Party and within the government --

MR. LUCE: This is a facilitated customs --

MS. CREIGHTON: -- the "max fac," maximum facilitation. So, you know, these are quite serious ideas that have been floated, but one by one they've all been batted away because they're nonsensical.

MR. LUCE: I have heard the max fac described as a cluster fac.

(Laughter) That's a whole other topic.

MS. CREIGHTON: Yeah. But so, yes, it's offensive and, yes, it sets back our relations. But, I mean, you're right. I mean, Ireland as a country is a much more, firstly, economically successful place than it was in 1973 when we joined the European communities. We have learned to stand on our own two feet. I mean, being part of the European Union and the European project has given us as a nation a self-confidence that did not exist heretofore. And that has actually been amplified over the last few years in particular.

So, you know, while Ireland actually currently has the fastest-growing economy in the European Union, unfortunately, the U.K. economy has actually slowed down very, very significantly. So we have a sense of confidence about our economy, about our society, about our politics, and nothing, you know, no degree of insults that might be flung at us by certain individuals in British politics will impact on that. And if anything, we definitely feel a stronger, more assured member of the European Union, as well.

I mean, there were many in London who doubted the solidarity between

EU member states and we said, oh, well, Berlin and Paris, when it comes down to it, will choose London over Dublin because of the strength and size of the U.K. But in reality, as we have seen, European solidarity and a view that those countries who wish to remain within the European Union, the single market and the customs union, will stick together and will defend the values and principles that underpin that union. And Ireland has benefited from that and that's why many are surprised to this day, even though we've been having these same conversations for at least 12 months around the border, around the peace process, and around this issue of a backstop.

And, you know, all of the predictions about fragmentation, about divide and conquer within the EU, have been proven wrong. And, in fact, Dublin's insistence at every stage that there would be solidarity has proven to be correct. And I have absolutely no doubt that that will continue right to the end of this process.

MR. LUCE: Douglas, briefly, because I want to ask Amanda.

MR. ALEXANDER: Lucinda was very gracious in dismissing the insults, but one of the most profoundly disturbing, distressing, depressing aspects of British public debate over the last 18 months has been the extent to which it has revealed very senior British politicians' profound ignorance of relationships with our neighbors in Ireland, a lack of affinity and understanding with the fragility of the peace that was hard-won and secured by politics, and can assuredly be undone by politics unless the right steps are taken. And if I'm absolutely honest, I think it's revealing of the character of the modern Conservative Party.

This used to be the Conservative and Unionist Party. What we're witnessing, I believe, in the United Kingdom today is the rise of English nationalism wrapped in the Union Jack. And actually what it's revealing is that many members of the Conservative and Unionist Party, because they still travel under that name, have a

cavalier disregard for the interests of the integrity of the United Kingdom. And in their minds if the cost of a so-called “clean Brexit” is the breakup of the United Kingdom, then that to them is a price that they would countenance paying. And that is, I’m afraid, a very mainstream opinion now within the Conservative Party, both in Parliament and certainly in its membership across the country.

MR. LUCE: Amanda, you’ve written a very good paper partly to accompany this panel about the constitutional implications within Britain for this. And Douglas has referred to the Irish reaction and Lucinda has spoken about that. You have got talk, the Taoiseach included, of a referendum for united Ireland. There’s certainly much more live talk of a second Scottish referendum. I’ve heard in reference to Douglas’ concerns about some of the ugliness of the debate in Britain, I’ve heard the acronymic description of what a Britain without Northern Ireland and Scotland would be, which is “Former United Kingdom of England and Wales,” FUKWEW, which I think would be a sort of an apt expression of some of the sentiment you’re talking about. (Laughter)

How likely is that in practice, though? The Scottish aren’t looking for a referendum right now because they wouldn’t win it, right?

MS. SLOAT: Well, I think there’s a lot of referendum fatigue in Scotland right now. They, of course, had a referendum in 2014. And as we were talking about earlier, I think we have learned that referenda do not answer these questions for generations. In fact, they continue to keep these questions alive. So there is fatigue over that.

I think having seen the messiness of Brexit divorce it highlights, in fact, how messy a Scotland-U.K. divorce would be. And also the discussion about Northern Ireland shows that if the U.K. is out of the customs union and single market, and Scotland wanted to rejoin the EU, you would then need to have some sort of hard border with

Scotland and England as a result of that. So I think the questions have become a lot more complicated in Scotland.

I think a lot of this is going to depend on how Brexit plays out. People in Scotland voted I think it was 68 percent to remain, so there was --

MR. LUCE: Sixty-two.

MS. SLOAT: Sixty-two percent, so there was overwhelming support in Scotland for staying in. Certainly there has historically been a feeling in Scotland that they are being dictated to by a government in London that they don't necessarily support and share the same views with.

And the one thing I talk about in my paper that I think is sort of wonky constitutional, but really matters is this question of where powers from Brussels are going to return when they come back from the U.K. And this has, in fact, become one of the big debates in Scotland that could motivate questions potentially for a second independence referendum.

When the Scottish Parliament, the other devolved governments were set up, the way the Scotland Act was written was that a number of powers were going to be reserved to Westminster, things like foreign affairs and trade, and everything else was going to be devolved to Scotland. So when powers come back from the EU, like environment, agriculture, fisheries, many in Scotland, particularly the Scottish Nationalist Party, but others, say these powers are not reserved and so they should be coming back to us. And this actually has gone to the Constitutional Court in the U.K. and is continuing to play out as a live issue as to who actually controls these powers.

If they are controlled by London for the sake of having a single market within the U.K. and things like agriculture and fisheries, you're going to have to deal with questions from the Scots, the Welsh, the Northern Irish about how they are involved in

these discussions in London in terms of domestic policymaking within the U.K.

MR. LUCE: I mean, in practical terms, the Scottish are not going to suddenly be waved into the EU, right? The Spanish are not going to want the Catalans to see that happening. There's going to be all kinds of forces discouraging. And from what I understand, Scottish public opinion is sort of paying heed to that. Do they really want this kind of reverse direction Brexit with all the sort of agonizing --

MS. SLOAT: Although I -- and Douglas can weigh in, but I think Brexit has changed the calculation a little bit. I mean, I think from the Spanish perspective, if this was a constitutional process, that you had a referendum in the U.K. and Scotland were to become independent through constitutional means, that answers some of the questions about this illegal referendum in Catalonia a couple years ago. And I think Brexit is the U.K. leaving the EU and Scotland wanting to remain. So that's a different question from Scotland seeking to become independent from the U.K. and then trying to get a back door into the EU.

Scotland, I think, would have to reapply for EU membership, but given that they currently implement all of the legislation, I think that would be a fairly easy case for them to make. And I think opinion seems to be evolving somewhat in the European Commission and Spain and some of the others about this question.

MR. LUCE: Douglas, as a Scot, do you want to --

MR. ALEXANDER: Well, I genuinely believe as of today the greatest threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom is not Scottish nationalism, but English nationalism. We made our choice back in 2014 by a 10 point margin, 45 to 55 percent. The choice was to stay within the United Kingdom.

In the mind of the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, she believed that that vote where Scotland did vote to remain as part of the Brexit referendum in 2016 would be

the spark, the provocation that would spike support for independence up above 50 percent. And, in fact, to change my metaphors, that was the dog that never barked. We really have not seen any significant change in the opinion polls in the months since 23rd of June 2016.

And in that sense I think there has been what Bill Clinton used to call a teachable moment as we witnessed the attempts to try and come to terms with the breakup of a 40-year union when contemplating the possibility of breaking up a 300-year union between Scotland and England. And the reality is that public opinion in Scotland at the moment remains opposed to independence.

If you look again objectively at what were the reasons why as Scots we made that choice, one of the reasons was economic. Very clearly the nationalists were unable to make the case that there were credible answers on the currency, on European membership as you describe, but also on the fiscal position given the volatility of the oil price. Each one of those issues have actually become more difficult, not more straightforward as a consequence of Brexit. So in that sense, I think, you know, Nicola Sturgeon, notwithstanding those difficulties, said she was going to call a second referendum and sought that mandate and proceeded to lose 21 of her seats in the House of Commons in the general election of 2017.

So I certainly wouldn't want to leave you with the impression that Scotland is champing at the bit for another referendum or, indeed, for independence. Far from it. On the other hand, my sense is if the nationalists are able to persuade people that there should be another referendum, they would fight the next referendum not on economics, but on emotion, on the inhospitability of being part of a little Britain outside of the United Kingdom, led by the likes of Boris Johnson or Jacob Rees-Mogg. And in that sense I do think that there are very real threats to the integrity of the United Kingdom

represented by the present government and the course that it's been set. But I think Scots at the moment have a view that says if we've shot ourselves in the foot, then let's not cut off our leg. (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: Let's stick with referendums for a moment and that sort of radical scenario, one of which was a no-deal Brexit, another of which is a people's vote for the whole of Britain to have a second bite at the apple.

Ken, there are a lot of, and as Lucinda mentioned, the degree of EU unity in these talks has been perhaps underestimated, certainly by the Brexiteers. They've been quite clear that our interests are with the member state involved here, and that's Ireland, and you're leaving a club.

In a sort of extreme scenario where we might be heading towards a no-deal Brexit, which would not just damage Britain, it would damage Ireland, it would damage Europe, do you think some of the sort of strong, some would argue fairly rigid European negotiating lines on the four freedoms of goods, that you've got to have all four or none, which is goods, services, capital, and people? Do you think that if it comes to sort of who blinks first situation there might be more flexibility in Europe given your Brussels negotiating experience?

SIR DARROCH: Just before I answer that, very quickly, we are not on the other side from the Irish government, for example, on the issue of the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. We're on the same side. We are both committed to no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. So what we're trying to do is work together to find a politically acceptable solution on that. The easy one, of course, is we get a free trade deal and then there is no question about what happens on the border. And so that's why the issue of the Plan B of the backstop is the one that's outstanding. So, you know, this isn't a kind of adversarial position.

On your question, look, I'm personally not surprised at the way that the negotiations have unfolded. If we get into a no-deal Brexit outcome, we will survive, but it will be, I think, damaging to both sides, the Europeans and to us. It's obviously much, much better, therefore, if we can find a way through.

For the reasons I explained -- set out in my first answer, I'm hopeful that we can. I said 95 percent of the withdrawal deal is done. The other task that we have to do is a political statement on the future, which needs to be substantive and detailed enough to provide for the meaningful vote that we promised in the House of Commons. But it's going to be a political declaration, not a full legal agreement, which we will then need to negotiate afterwards.

But it's difficult for me to see why, given the disadvantages of any other approach, why it shouldn't be possible to reach that political outcome at either a special European Council or the December European Council. So I'm hopeful, optimistic. We will see what -- as the President often says, we'll see what happens next. (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: We'll see what happens next. And you've got an admirable assumption that other people share your rationality to this, but, of course, the key actors here are not necessarily weighing up things in a judicious manner. My question is whether that also applies to the Europeans.

I mean, Lucinda, you've also got rich experience in Europe. The assumption by the British or many people in Britain has been Merkel is more sympathetic to a pragmatic deal. Angela Merkel would be more sympathetic to something ad hoc that would suit Britain whereas Macron is a lot more theological on you have rules of a club and we're not going to bend them. Might that change? The same question as I opposed to the ambassador, might that change in extreme sort of game of chicken circumstances as we approach the deadline?

MS. CREIGHTON: Well, I think Merkel is a great friend of the U.K. And going back to the sort of slow-motion car crash as I see it which led to the referendum in the U.K., you know, all through that period where David Cameron was trying to negotiate some sort of a compromise, some sort of a deal that could work for the U.K. and would allow him to go back and have this referendum, but convince voters to stay in, Merkel held joint cabinet meetings with the British government. You know, ministers were -- I mean, there was huge intensity in that relationship. So she is -- I mean, I think I genuinely can say I think there's probably nobody around the table in the European Council as sorry as she is to see what has unfolded.

But to interpret that as a willingness to compromise on the fundamental pillars of the European Union, the four freedoms, I think is to grossly misunderstand her. She is totally wedded to the free movement of people and she is totally committed to maintaining the integrity of the single market and the customs union. So that is not just a French position. That is fundamentally a German position.

And I've listed for the last two years to people in London saying, oh, yeah, but the German car manufacturers, they're going to lean on the German government and there's going to be some sort of a compromise, a last minute deal around this. And I think that that's completely wrong and I think it's been proven to be wrong. And, frankly, Merkel has faced them down at every stage and has made it clear, I mean, has effectively issued communiques to German industry to say the single market is non-negotiable and it is a fundamental principle. And Germany really sees itself as the custodian of those ideals, those European ideals.

So, if anything, you know, the risk of fragmentation makes that commitment stronger from a German point of view. So no is the answer. I don't see any wavering on that and I don't see pressure coming, as has been anticipated, in London

since the beginning of the process, pressure coming from Germany and Paris on Dublin to somehow water down the language around the backstop and the border. That's not going to happen and I think people are really misunderstanding what the European project is about and what it means to France and Germany if they think that's going to happen.

MR. LUCE: Of course, as we were discussing at lunch, even if Merkel were playing that role that some in Britain hoped she would be, there's no guarantee she'll even have a government or be in government by next March 2019.

MS. CREIGHTON: This is a huge problem, yeah, yeah.

MR. LUCE: Her position is so --

MS. CREIGHTON: So, I mean, this is a problem for Europe as whole, which is the diminution of her influence and power and her weakened position in Germany. There's no question about that.

And also, I mean, Macron, in a sense, is emboldened, you know, has a strong mandate and a big majority in Parliament, but is really, really struggling in opinion polls. And how there's this test case in terms of what they're going to do for the European elections in this sort of liberal alliance that he's pulling together.

There are a lot of variables, but I think the one thing that is certain is that the European -- the existing 27, including some countries that have had pretty controversial disputes at European Council level: Hungary, Poland, and so on. I mean, they have all pretty fundamentally been unified around the four freedoms. And I think that that is set to continue.

So yes, Angela Merkel is a pragmatist. Yes, she wants to deal with the U.K., but it will be a deal on the terms of the basic fundamental principles of the European Union.

MR. LUCE: So let's get to the other extreme scenario. Possibly for most types of people in this room a benign extreme scenario, which is that that march last Saturday does bear fruit. It is the largest march in recent history, although it's worth pointing out that the last largest march was against the Iraq war and that didn't work. (Laughter) But nevertheless, this is 700,000 people.

In order to get that fantasy scenario of a second referendum, you're going to need one of the leaders of the two main parties to support it, aren't you? You're going to need Jeremy Corbyn to have a road to Damascus moment or else in some sort of scenario to be ousted and replaced by somebody else, which I think is probably even less likely at this point than having a second referendum.

What are the chances, in your view, that pro-European members of the Labour Party, like yourself, people like yourself who are still in politics, can point to Corbyn and say, look, three out of four labor voters want Britain to remain in Europe? These are your people. There are, to put it very crudely, 1.6 million more young voters in the British electorate than there were 2 years ago, and the young tend to be more pro-Europe. And to put it even more crudely, 750,000 fewer older voters because of mortality.

The opinion polls show that it would probably win. You know, opinion polls can't be trusted, but, nevertheless, there is a strong argument you can make to Corbyn that you've just got to get with the tide here. What are the chances that argument is going to make headway in the coming weeks?

MR. ALEXANDER: Well, I don't think the argument that you've set out would come as news to Jeremy Corbyn, and that has not shifted the position that he's adopted. The position that was carefully negotiated at the Labour Party conference after many hours of negotiation was that the option of a second vote was kept on the table, but

only in circumstances where first they had been deadlock in Parliament, and then the option of a general election had been rejected.

And I think in terms of those 750,000 people in the streets of London at the weekend, that actually is the only credible route by which their aspiration will be fulfilled, which would be that we do see all of the possible alternatives, even a deal that's negotiated and voted down in the House of Commons towards the end of this year, the very beginning of next year. The Labour Party naturally is the party of opposition at that point, agitating for a general election, although let's remember there are still the Fixed Term Parliament Act, which is a consequence of the last coalition government and them being unsuccessful in precipitating a general election.

I find it personally very hard to believe that even conservatives angry with Theresa May over the deal that she brings back from Brussels are likely to walk into the division lobbies if the consequence of walking into the division lobbies is to put themselves in front of the British people anytime soon. I think both the Democratic Unionist Party and the Conservative Party are deeply fearful of losing a general election to Jeremy Corbyn. And so this Parliament will probably last a bit longer than quite a lot of the heated commentary at the moment suggests.

But in those circumstances, in some ways the question is as much for Theresa May as for Jeremy Corbyn. If hard proposals have been rejected, if Parliament is deadlocked, she won't countenance a general election, could there be circumstances in which she said, we'll we've tried our best. Parliament is deadlocked. We have to take this back to the people and, at that point, have a second vote. That would certainly require the support of the EU 27 in terms of a unanimous commitment to extend the Article 50 timetable. I think that would be forthcoming in those circumstances, but it's a huge "if."

And you're absolutely right in your observation, which is in a parliamentary democracy, which notwithstanding all of our discussions on referenda Britain remains, you need the principal opposition or the principal party of government to move to create circumstances which a secondary referendum could take place. And right now neither the leader of the Labour Party nor the leader of the Conservative Party is particularly minded to go down that route.

MS. SLOAT: The other question, of course, is what the referendum question is. I mean, is it a take or leave the negotiated deal? Or is it a second referendum on whether or not you want to go forward with Brexit?

MR. LUCE: Yeah. I mean, I presume an evil Remainer, an evil, scheming, Machiavellian Remainer, "Remoaner" as they're called, would actually sort of arrange circumstances where Parliament does this, the prime minister can't have a general election. And the scenario you just set out is, okay, we'll put it back to the people, in which case what would the question be?

MR. ALEXANDER: Well, I think the only circumstances in which you get to that question is a profound constitutional crisis. And you can clearly imagine the circumstances in which at that point the prime minister, if it's still Theresa May, says, well, let's put my deal to the people and the alternative being no deal. I have to say I would be very surprised if the European Council at that point was prepared to extend the Article 50 process if it was only to ratify the deal that had been done rather than remain. But let's see, that may be a scenario.

And I certainly think there would be a lot of voices agitating within the Labour Party to avoid that being the choice because the Labour Party will already have rejected Theresa May's deal and clearly doesn't want to see no deal. So it would leave the Labour Party in something of a dilemma as to what to campaign for if that referendum

came to pass.

So I think you can conceive of circumstances where you could have a Conservative leader proposing a referendum as a choice between hard deal and no deal, and a Labour Party politician leading the opposition, arguing at that point for Remain versus the prime minister's deal.

MS. CREIGHTON: I think in the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world, I think it would be very difficult for a prime minister to take a deal that's been rejected in the House of Commons and put it to the people. I mean, I think it would be just a bizarre scenario.

I think much more likely is that there will be motion -- I mean, if this plays out and if the deal is rejected in Parliament, that there will be an interim notion of no confidence in Theresa May, that she'll be deposed as leader. And then the DUP will do business with Boris Johnson or whoever to make them prime minister and have a second bite of the cherry. That's my prediction.

MR. LUCE: In which case I will predict it'll be 1.4 million people on the next march, not 700,000. (Laughter)

MR. ALEXANDER: Certainly. I think Lucinda's point is a fair one. I think there is every possibility Theresa May will not be the prime minister in the next few weeks and months. But I don't think we should read that as meaning there's going to be a change of government and a general election. There's a very credible scenario that we see a change of prime minister, but both the DUP and the Conservative Party resisting the option of going to the country at that point.

MS. CREIGHTON: And the DUP has not very subtly hinted at this in the last few weeks, where they have actually expressed an opinion and a preference for the next leader of the Conservative Party.

MR. LUCE: So this gets deeper into the populace problem. Let's just sort of go with that scenario, a DUP-backed, overtly pro-Brexit, Boris Johnson-type government. The DUP is socially not progressive, to put it mildly. It's been described as the political arm of the 17th century. (Laughter) It's positions on various issues are not in tune with the larger public. That kind of scenario is also a constitutional breakdown scenario, isn't it? Isn't that in support of a (inaudible)?

MR. ALEXANDER: Yeah, I don't think it's an overstatement to say that we are in uncharted waters and we will be in even more uncharted waters in circumstances where Parliament rejects all of the options. And as I say, every one of the scenarios that we're describing, one is left slightly scratching one's head thinking the United Kingdom couldn't get to that place, could it? In a few weeks we could be in exactly that place.

MR. LUCE: So isn't that Theresa May's sort of ultimate trump card with the Brexiteers that actually rather their government being formed, we could have a general election and it could be Corbyn who's the next prime minister? In which case it's either my deal, it's Chequers, or Corbyn. And that's a more persuasive argument than the DUP short-lived Brexiteer coalition.

MR. ALEXANDER: But the position of the Brexiteers is that that threat is a false one because they will be able to vote down the deal and then not vote for the Fixed Term Parliament Act to be revoked. And so in that sense, that will certainly be a threat made by the Whips, but they'll call their bluff at that point.

And I think it's important to recognize this is a psychodrama and a civil war engulfing the British Conservative Party. Rationality only has a very small part to play in the drama that is unfolding within the Conservative Party right now.

MS. CREIGHTON: I think it's important, as well, to understand the fear

of the hardline Brexiteers. Their greatest fear is, for example, Theresa May's concession or proposal at the Council, the European Council, last week to extend the transition period. That's the absolute disastrous scenario for them. So they don't particularly want a deal. They're quite happy to end up with no deal because it's better than the alternative, which could be a prolonged transition that ultimately might lead to a soft Brexit, the U.K. staying in the single market customs union, and that to them is not Brexit.

So they are totally ideologically opposed to that. And I think it's fairly predictable that they would rather a no-deal scenario than a scenario that allows for potentially an election in a couple of years that would lead to even potentially another referendum or a soft Brexit. They don't want that.

MS. SLOAT: And that was -- there was a survey that came out a couple weeks ago saying 87 percent of the people in Northern Ireland who supported Remain said the peace process was a price to pay to ensure Brexit happened.

MR. LUCE: Right. That's a cheerful thought. (Laughter)

I want in a moment to get to questions, but just very quickly a couple of questions. One for you, Ken. You do a wonderful job as one of Britain's top diplomats putting the best face on what Britain's up to. (Laughter) Would it be fair to say that's more difficult now than it was earlier in your career? And what ways do you have to manage the cognitive dissonance of the demands on your role?

SIR DARROCH: Do I look like I'm aging fast? (Laughter)

MR. LUCE: You're doing well.

SIR DARROCH: Thank you. Look, this is -- I mean, first of all, it's a privilege to be British ambassador to the United States. It's, I think, the best job in our system, so I'm delighted to be here. It's a fascinating time to be in America. (Laughter) The Brexit story back in the U.K. has added an extra layer of complexity and challenge to

the job, but I welcome it all, honestly. And thank you for your concern, but I'm fine.

(Laughter)

MR. LUCE: Good answer. Let's go to questions. I've got a couple more of mine I'll sort of inveigle in, but let's open this up to the audience. And just a couple of strictures. One, no speeches or life history. Simple questions.

A gentleman two-thirds of the way back there. And just a straight question.

MR. O'FARRELL: Okay. My name is Michael O'Farrell. I have a unique competence over the panel. I grew up in Ulster and I know it intimately. And I know what people across Europe know. And the ambassador from his youthful diplomatic career will know that there was never stability in Northern Ireland until the Anglo-Irish Agreement came. Britain itself had no stability during your youthful career because of (inaudible) constantly in London and Britain. And as the prime minister and foreign minister of Austria told Theresa May a couple of weekend ago, they know that there is no stability in modern Europe without stability on the periphery.

So I wanted to ask the question which I asked here nine months when the Irish finance minister talked in a similar session on Brexit. Where and how are the views and preferences and needs of the people of Northern Ireland, who voted in a majority, despite Amanda's dire updated statistic, which I question, but the majority of people in Northern Ireland and the vast majority on the island of Ireland see their economic and political stability and future in the context of a modern Europe?

The one thing that appalls me about today is I haven't heard almost nothing, apart perhaps a little from Lucinda, as to the reality on the ground in the border counties that can sustain stability in whatever arrangement comes out. Can you, Ambassador, please inform us as to what deliberations have taken place to consult and

bring on board the needs and views of the people of Northern Ireland in whatever political arrangements you're moving towards?

SIR DARROCH: The first thing to say is that the Good Friday Agreement was, I agree, one of the highlights and the great pieces of statesmanship of recent years. And this prime minister, this government are determined, absolutely determined, to maintain the process, the peace process which resulted from that and has brought such needed stability and peace to Northern Ireland. Through the first half of my career I lived through the Troubles and had the task of explaining what was going on in Northern Ireland and on mainland Britain at times when I was posted overseas. And personally, it's just a huge transformation now to be talking about the still difficult politics in Northern Ireland, but from a position where the Troubles have ceased.

So, look, the prime minister and ministers and the whole of the civil service are really committed to preserving this agreement. The prime minister is actually taking big political risks and has, in a way, gone to the wall over the issue of maintaining an open border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. She's taken a lot of criticism from some of her back bench colleagues over that and she's remained committed to it. And the reason we are in these difficult negotiations now about the backstop arrangements is because she is so committed to this objective and trying to find a way through on it.

In terms of what we are doing to keep the people of Northern Ireland, of course there are endless debates in the House of Commons on this in which MPs from Northern Ireland are participating, there is a formal process under which the Westminster, the government, is consulting the devolved administrations and that has met -- I mean, certainly the figures are in double figures on all the times they have met. And in those meetings government ministers, Westminster ministers explain where we've got in the

negotiations and seeks the views of those they are talking to. So in the formal process there's what goes on in Parliament and then beyond that there is a lively media and public debate about the whole process.

But I think the prime minister has demonstrated amply how committed she is to preserving life in Northern Ireland and that open border as clearly as possible. And that's government policy and that's what we're going to deliver.

MR. LUCE: Everybody actually wants to answer this question, so briefly, Lucinda.

MS. CREIGHTON: Okay. Well, firstly, thank you. And I think maybe because I'm so immersed in this debate at home in Ireland, I mean, the views of people from Northern Ireland, from both sides of the divide and particularly the border counties, are absolutely live and part of the consciousness of the political debate. And I think it has been a huge priority for the government of Dublin.

I mean, the one thing I would say is that we are without, or the people of Northern Ireland are without, political representation. And I see Consul-General Houston here, who has been representing the interests of the people for Northern Ireland in the U.S., but we do not have an executive in Northern Ireland. And I think it's shameful, frankly, over 500 days with no representation from the main political parties in Northern Ireland. And at the same time, one of the main parties in Northern Ireland refusing to take their seats in Westminster and represent the views of the people of Northern Ireland.

So there is a huge vacuum in terms of representation, direct representation, in Belfast and in London on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, which is an absolute disgrace. But in terms of how they are being represented and at every step taken into deep consideration by political representatives in Dublin, I genuinely believe that they absolutely are being represented and that the nuance and the sensitivity

of the across the divide in Northern Ireland is very much understood, appreciated, and of huge concern in Dublin, and I have to say in Brussels.

And that is why everywhere I go in other EU member states and capitals across the European Union, the first question they ask when they hear I'm Irish is what about the peace process? What about the Good Friday Agreement? What about the border? So there is a huge consciousness of the impact and the potential catastrophe that Brexit may bring to bear on Northern Ireland, and huge solidarity as a result of it.

MR. LUCE: Douglas.

MR. ALEXANDER: I was actually in Belfast last week for a couple of days meeting with the Northern Irish Chamber of Commerce, manufacturing in Northern Ireland, and other organizations, and there is very real concern, I would actually say fear in Northern Ireland as to what lies ahead, a genuine sense of foreboding. And while I concur absolutely with what Kim said in terms of the seriousness and the commitment of the British government to the peace process and to the absence of a hard border, it is an inescapable truth that Brexit has reintroduced the border question to Northern Irish politics in a way that it was otherwise absent.

Let's not forget that one of the architects of the Good Friday Agreement, the late, great John Hume, talked about Europe changing the geometry of the conversation in Northern Ireland because it created the space in which people could self-identify as Irish, self-identify as British, and find common ground after years of sectarian conflict. And in that sense, I am deeply troubled as to the effect that Brexit is going to have on the good will and the seriousness with with both governments in Dublin and London want to try and find a way forward, but the reality is there are very difficult days ahead.

MR. LUCE: Amanda.

MS. SLOAT: Just the statistic was from the British Social Attitude Survey and it was 87 percent of the 45 percent or so who voted to remain, so a small percentage of that. But I appreciate your comments.

I lived in Northern Ireland for three years. I moved there a week before 9-11, so I feel very emotionally attached to everything that's happening there. And when I was back in May, I was also very struck, as Douglas and Lucinda were just talking about, by how destabilizing everything has become. When I moved there it was three years after the Good Friday Agreement. I lived with a Catholic woman who had just joined the police service of Northern Ireland, who eventually had to move out of our flat because we were close to an IRA stronghold. And it had been encouraging to see how far everything had come in the subsequent 20 years. And I was very struck tangibly when I was there by how destabilizing things were.

Douglas made reference to this question of the border, but it's raised questions of identity. It's raised questions of the Constitution. The Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed in January of 2017 over a domestic political dispute. Very unlikely it's going to get reconstituted until Brexit is resolved. The Westminster Parliament is currently looking at legislation to give civil servants in Northern Ireland more authorities to be able to make decisions in the absence of this.

So in addition to all of the identity and Constitution questions it's raised, there is practically no governance on the ground in Northern Ireland. The DUP doesn't actually control any of the bordering constituencies with the Republic of Ireland. And so a lot of the instability is being questioned by people there.

The paper that I've written outlined a lot of the practical questions that Brexit is raising, both in terms of agriculture, business, and the one that struck me was the increase in all island services that have developed since the Good Friday Agreement.

One in particular which I think is quite poignant is health services.

There was a decision which the DUP had supported to close the one children's cancer hospital in Belfast and centralize all children's cardiology in Dublin. And so there's now questions if you have a hard Brexit as to what the access of medical services for people living in Northern Ireland is going to be to people in the Republic. So this has a huge raft of consequences across the board on all areas of people's daily lives in Northern Ireland.

MR. LUCE: Thank you. So the gentleman at the back and then you, and then, well, then the lady in front of you sitting there.

SPEAKER: Hello.

MR. LUCE: And brief questions because our time is short.

MR. CHARTER: Very brief question. David Charter from the London Times, a countryman of Sir Kim, of course, as confused as worried about it as everyone.

Might I ask you, Sir Kim, you very confidently state that the free trade agreement will solve the border issue. I didn't hear any dissent from the panel. I wonder if the panel agree with that. And I'd like you to expand briefly on how that works. You may say to me it requires very close regulatory alignment, but surely the greater the regulatory and deeper the regulatory alignment, the less opportunity or possibility there is for Britain to strike its own free trade agreements because they simply wouldn't be able to vary that deal to do international trade agreements, would they?

MR. LUCE: Who would like to take that?

MS. CREIGHTON: Well, I mean, very briefly, I think you're absolutely right. And even the reports in today's paper is another version of our customs arrangement, which is purportedly now in the draft text for the exit agreement, I think potentially places huge restrictions and potentially makes the striking of bilateral free

trade agreements between the U.K. and other countries pretty much impossible. So from an actual technical and practical point of view, it's not clear to me how this will actually work in practice.

And then obviously, you know, the point which I think Douglas made quite eloquently earlier around actually the desire of other countries to strike free trade agreements with the U.K., particularly the U.S., which is the one that is held up as the obvious example, it's very hard to see how either a customs or a free trade arrangement which keeps the U.K. in very, very close alignment, if not full alignment, from a regulatory point of view with the rest of the EU, how that will work or play with President Trump's desire for much greater regulatory divergence from the rest of the EU and, ultimately, his America First policy. It's really unclear to me how any of that is compatible, frankly.

MR. LUCE: How you'd stop that chlorinated chicken going from Belfast to Dublin.

MR. ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MS. CREIGHTON: Exactly.

MR. ALEXANDER: Let me just offer three very quick points. Firstly, I think it was a Danish commentator who observed Britain seems to be going from a country that was in that wants opt-outs to a country that's out that wants opt-ins. And on the specific issue of trade, the basic premise of your question is right, which is the greater the degree of regulatory alignment, the easier the frictionless character of the trade. And one of the difficulties is knowing what Brexiteer ministers in Britain actually want. Do they want all of the divergence that they've been making speeches about for years or do they want the frictionless trade? But it's very difficult to achieve both. The answer that you get is, well, listen, we want a super Canada-plus deal.

Now, let's just take a second on the Canada deal. It stretches to 1,600

pages. It took seven years to negotiate. It effectively excludes services that constitute 79 percent of the present British economy. And in that sense the idea that it alone resolves all of the economic challenges of Brexit I think are misplaced. And it certainly doesn't resolve the specific issue of the Irish border that we spent quite a lot of time discussing today.

MR. LUCE: And the lady in the second from back row.

SPEAKER: Thank you. So I have two questions. Firstly, what do you think will happen if Parliament does not vote for this deal, this U.K. Parliament?

Secondly, all the 27 member countries, their Parliament also has to vote for it. What if one of them does not?

MS. SLOAT: Well, on the second, it's just the European Parliament that needs to ratify.

MS. CREIGHTON: And the Council.

MR. LUCE: And the Council. I think we've probably been a little bit into the first question, what happens if Parliament doesn't vote, but would anybody like to add to what they've said of that scenario? I mean, we've been painting the Halloween scenarios for a while. No?

The gentleman here in the front row and then you.

MR. DOEHLER: I'm Austin Doehler with the Center for European Policy Analysis. You mentioned some various referendum scenarios, for example, Scotland and that kind of hypothetical what-if kind of case. Is there some sort of fanciful, but not completely unrealistic scenario in which Northern Ireland has a referendum as the union government on reuniting the Republic of Ireland as a way to stay in the EU or is that just completely outside any realm of possibility? Thank you.

MR. LUCE: So that's a good question. The first question I did ask about

paying attention to the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland, but if this province which voted quite strongly to remain gets more and more remain and more and more Protestants begin to realize that the cost-benefit now has changed, you could get a united Ireland referendum in the next 5, 10 years? Is that now realistic?

MS. CREIGHTON: Me? So certainly not in the next 5 to 10 years in my opinion. I can simply express an opinion. And I think there's been a lot of -- obviously, I mean, the first thing that happened at least in my consciousness after the U.K. voted in favor of leaving the European Union was Sinn Féin issued a press release demanding a Border poll. And that was, you know, as predictable as night following day.

From my point of view, I think it's really unhelpful having this conversation right now. I think it really alienates the Unionist population. I think we have a tendency to think about the DUP exclusively in the context of this discussion. And there's a tendency to sort of dismiss the DUP, a little bit as you did earlier. You know, they're sort of a relic and they're hardliners and --

SIR DARROCH: I apologize.

MS. CREIGHTON: No, no, but you know what I mean. I mean, that's a common view and it's the view that propagated in the media and in political discourse in the south of Ireland, as well. I think it completely ignores the fact that there is a whole Unionist population in Northern Ireland, many of whom don't vote for the DUP and don't support the DUP necessarily, but who are Unionists and who believe in the union and who are really threatened by this talk of a Border poll, of a united Ireland, and who do genuinely now and increasingly believe that the position of the European Union or the position in Dublin is somehow designed to sort of propel that and to accelerate that process.

And I think we really need to be mindful of the views and sensitive to the

views in Northern Ireland of all communities. And we also need to understand that the Good Friday Agreement, the peace process, and everything that underpins the peace process is based on the principle of consent, consent of both communities. And I think there's a real risk that we sort of lose sight of that.

So, I mean, I can quote the Tánaiste, our deputy prime minister, who said he expects that there's a prospect of a united Ireland in his lifetime and that may very well be the case. He's a few years older than me. But I simply believe that it's not helpful to be talking about that right at this point in time. It's way too politically sensitive and I think that we have to deal with this really difficult hand that we have been dealt. We have to respect both communities. And it may very well be that -- I think it probably is the case and I think if you read Amanda's paper about the constitutional implications and the devolution implications of Brexit on the U.K. as a whole, you probably have to conclude that it has accelerated this discussion.

But my view is the responsible political thing to do at the moment is to try to, you know, steal the phrase from Michel Barnier, de-dramatize this discussion and actually focus on the challenge at hand and trying to keep all communities north and south of the border, Catholics, Protestants, comfortable with this process to achieve the best outcome for everybody.

MS. SLOAT: No, I mean, I agree with that. I mean, I don't think it's likely in the near term, but it's a possibility. But I also agree that the fact that we're even having this discussion is what's been so destabilizing in Northern Ireland. Because the beauty of the Good Friday Agreement was that it largely took the constitutional question off the table for the near term. And the fact that you had the U.K. and the Irish governments in the EU meant that this was almost a non-issue. I mean, the Unionists could stay part of the union. They could feel Unionists, nationalists were able to operate without borders,

without restrictions. And so the damaging effect of a Brexit on the psyche in Northern Ireland is the fact that this is becoming a live question again.

I think opinion polls are showing that there has been an increase in support for Remain in Northern Ireland as a result of the contested nature of these conversations. The demographics don't necessarily support it and you don't necessarily have all nationalists, aside from the Sinn Féin, as Lucinda was saying, calling for it, supporting moving in that direction.

MR. LUCE: So we've got three or four minutes left. Time for a couple of additional questions. The woman in the middle on the right.

SPEAKER: Hi. I was just wondering, given what you've talked about with the U.S. and U.K. wanting a free trade deal being one of the key priorities of both countries and especially, you know, Brexiteers, and given that right after Brexit there'll sort of be that two-year customs union, what would the U.S. and U.K. be able to -- not be able to implement an actual trade deal, what would they be able to actually negotiate given that the U.K. will be deciding how closely aligned it will be with the EU? So what are topics or areas that you see where they could actually be negotiating?

MR. LUCE: Ambassador?

SIR DARROCH: It depends in part on how long it takes to negotiate the legal text that will turn into a proper treaty, the political deal that we expect to do as part of the overall package about the future relationship between the EU and U.K. Now, if there is a good deal of detail in that political text, there needs to be some detail to have a meaningful vote in the House of Commons, which has been promised. Then we should have a reasonable idea of the direction of travel for the U.K.-EU agreement as we kick off the negotiations with the U.S. on the free trade deal.

So it's all highly speculative. We'll see how it unfolds, but you can

imagine that for a while the negotiations are running in parallel, but we do the deal with the EU more quickly, then we can finish negotiations with the U.S. And then once you know exactly where we've got with the EU, then that will make the U.S. deal much easier to complete. But I'd say it's speculative.

We've actually already used the working group we've established as the eventual form in which we will negotiate the free trade deal, to do a south technology agreement which will strengthen cooperation between the respective scientific communities, and to look at issues around financial services regulation where there may be some quick wins and some low-hanging fruit, which we can do even before we have left the European Union because it's consistent with EU continuing their participation in the single market and the customs union.

So there's stuff we can certainly do from the outset and then as the relationship with the EU becomes clearer in its detail and that will help us conclude the U.K.-U.S. element.

MR. LUCE: So there's time for a final question. I'm sorry, your hand's been up a long time, the gentleman in the middle.

MR. STACEY: Jeff Stacey from Geopolicity. The elephant in the room seems to be the European Union. What should the EU do if its interests are to keep the U.K. in, if it values the diplomatic, intelligence, defense capabilities and many others and really wants the U.K. to reconsider and get to a referendum? What should the EU do now if the papers are correct and they're putting the customs union in the deal and they find a technical or whatever solution to the backstop? Doesn't that get to a soft Brexit, which they don't really want?

So should the EU actually sabotage May, try to prevent a deal in Parliament and get to a second referendum? But does that trigger a no confidence vote?

MR. LUCE: (Laughter) A lot of questions in there. We need really efficient answers from volunteers. (Laughter) Kim, you're volunteering.

SIR DARROCH: I think the EU should give us what we're asking for. (Laughter)

MR. ALEXANDER: That's been the British negotiating position for the last year. (Laughter) It's why we're having this conversation.

I would make a couple of points. Firstly, I think one of the tragedies of Brexit is that I think probably in the next 10 years we will see EU-wide reform of free movement of labor. And the only issue that I think that is big enough that could have caused the British people to rethink the vote that they made would have been a significant EU write-off on free movement of labor. But that moment, I fear, has passed.

I then think given President Macron's recent speech in terms of reimagining Europe as a series of concentric circles, there's no reason why in the future Britain couldn't see itself in at least one of those circles. But I fear that the urgent and the important task of resolving the difficulties that we've been discussing today is going to crowd out all of those longer term conversations in the next few weeks.

MR. LUCE: Well, I don't think we've fulfilled Barnier's goal of de-dramatizing this, but we have, I hope, detoxified it. So thank you very much for the panel for a very good turn. (Applause)

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