



## UK must become champion of free trade

By Paola Del Bigio

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The Withdrawal Agreement is in place as a bedrock for how the UK gets along in the post Brexit era. The choice, as the Prime Minister rightly acknowledged, is not between “deal or not deal”. As he pointed out “We have a deal – we have done it!”. The Brexit deadline on the 31<sup>st</sup> January has effectively marked an historic change which will allow the UK government to forge a future free trading relationship with the EU27 without being tied to its rules. The UK has therefore now effectively become a sovereign and independent country again, making a clean break into a future where it will have the freedoms to chart its own course in the world. While setting out on his own vision for a UK-EU trade deal in a speech on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, Boris Johnson focussed on unleashing Britain’s potential by “taking back control of our tariff schedule ... with our UN Ambassador in Geneva ... we are re-emerging after decades of hibernation”... free trade has been choked ... the mercantilists, the protectionists are gaining ground, ...Free trade is God’s diplomacy, it is the only certain way to unite people in the bonds of peace. I want Great Britain to be a catalyst for free trade”. Getting this done will mean tackling the UK’s long-term economic challenges by foremost hammering out a future partnership which would see Britain free to trade significantly with the EU27, without being bogged down by its rules. In actual fact, this would require refusing to play on the EU’s “level-playing field”- a requirement that Mr

Barnier, the EU’s chief negotiator, could pursue by trying to force the UK to either break the negotiating deadline, accept a bad deal or walk away from the negotiating table. Reassuringly however, even in the unfortunate event of a no-deal exit scenario, the UK would still be allowed to trade on WTO terms. This would mean embracing the opportunities of a newfound independence and ultimately, reuniting the country. However, by looking for a trade and economic relationship with the EU, “our historic friends”, “the UK will not engage in a throat-race or undermine European standards”, rather it would conceive the possibility of having to leave without a trade deal in place. The choice already put forward by the PM as political role models are encapsulated in a relationship “comparable to Canada’s – or more like Australia’s (2008-EU Australian Partnership Framework), which would envisage trade taking place largely on WTO terms, and other agreements on areas pertaining to security and aviation. To this end, Mr Raab, has recently met with his Australian counterpart, Mrs Marise Payne and discussed the UK’s intent to sign a high profile trade deal. An agreement was also struck to find opportunities for engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. In the words of the Foreign Secretary: “Australia would hopefully be part of the first wave of high-priority deals that we are pursuing”



Mr Johnson will also bring forward his Trade Bill this month which will include measures to stop foreign countries from gaining an unfair advantage from UK exports, as the country moves away from EU regulations. The Bill could most likely include a Trade Remedies Authority to stop foreign countries exporting low-quality goods in the UK in order to protect British Trade, possibly resembling a “Singapore – on Thames” style economy.

As the UK enters this new-outward looking era which will take back control of its borders, laws and money, other than trade, UK Ministers are preparing to talk boldly with their EU counterparts in the ensuing negotiations. This can be summarized in the Chief Secretary to the Treasury Rishi Sunak’s words: “We have left... there are lots of different ways that countries trade with each other”. Hopefully the UK will not be forced to reject a steep price for a new EU deal.