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Dear Ms McGoldrick,

Thank you for your letter of 28 July to the Prime Minister setting out the Council's position in relation to the negotiations on the future relationship with the EU. I am responding as the Paymaster General.

I appreciate the Council's concerns given the ongoing Coronavirus crisis. However, I can assure the Council that both the UK and the EU remain fully committed to the negotiations and to reaching an agreement before the end of the year.

We were explicit in our manifesto that 'we will not extend the transition period beyond December 2020'. This commitment is now enshrined in UK law, through the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, and this Government is intent on honouring it.

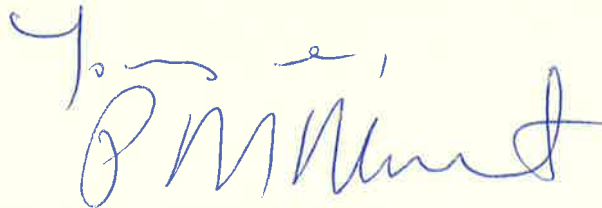
Extending the transition period would prolong business uncertainty and delay the moment of control of our borders. An extension would also mean having to make further payments into the EU budget and this would keep us bound by EU legislation, at a point when we need legislative and economic flexibility to manage the UK's response to the current pandemic. As the EU looks to deal with the impacts of the Coronavirus on the 27 member states, they will need to propose all kinds of new legislation and policies which will be designed for the 27 rather than being tailored in a way that suits the interests of the UK. We require fiscal and legislative freedom, which will allow us to drive the UK's recovery on the basis of what we decide is needed.

Given the ongoing crisis, the structure of negotiations has changed. On 15 June the Prime Minister met the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, by videoconference to take stock of progress with the aim of agreeing actions to move forward in negotiations on the future relationship. The Parties agreed to intensify talks in July and to create the most conducive conditions for concluding and ratifying a deal before the end of 2020.

Further negotiating rounds have been taking place in August and September. To accompany and complement the negotiating rounds, and in line with institutional and transparency arrangements in place on each side, the Chief Negotiators from both sides and their teams will meet as necessary in a more restricted format to ensure progress in the negotiations. Specialised sessions may also work under their authority on issues of particular difficulty in the negotiations to ensure that parallel progress is achieved across all workstreams.

There are large areas of convergence in many of the areas discussed and we will keep working to bridge the gaps where differences remain. Our assessment is that an agreement can be reached in September, and we will continue to negotiate with this aim in mind. However, the UK's sovereignty - over our laws, our courts or our fishing waters - is not up for discussion and we will not accept any proposals which compromise this.

While I recognise this reply may disappoint the Council, I hope it is helpful in clarifying the Government's position.



**Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP**  
**PAYMASTER GENERAL**