



# Reading between the lines May's letter to Tusk



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THE PRIME MINISTER

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*Dear President Tusk*



"This letter sets out the approach of Her Majesty's Government to the discussions we will have about the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union and about the deep and special partnership we hope to enjoy – as your closest friend and neighbour – with the European Union once we leave."

On no fewer than seven occasions in her six-page letter, Theresa May referred to the "deep and special relationship" the United Kingdom seeks with the European Union after Brexit. It's an echo of the "special relationship", a formulation the UK has long used to characterise its close bond with the United States. It also set the tone of May's letter, which was more conciliatory - dare we say it, more pro-European - than any of her previous set-piece speeches on the topic. Remove a dozen lines and it could have been an application letter.

"We therefore believe it is necessary to agree the terms of our future partnership alongside those of our withdrawal from the European Union."

This seemingly innocuous line hints at one of the key early points of disagreement between London and other European capitals. In effect there will be two big Brexit deals: one to set the terms of the UK's exit and another to outline the future relationship between the UK and the EU. As May indicates, her government wants the two deals to be worked out

concurrently. In Brussels and elsewhere on the continent, the desire is to agree each deal sequentially. The most likely choreography, according to one senior EU official, is that informal talks on the future relationship will take place in the background over the next two years but that no formal agreement will be agreed until after the divorce terms are finalised.

"If, however, we leave the European Union without an agreement the default position is that we would have to trade on World Trade Organisation terms. In security terms a failure to reach agreement would mean our cooperation in the fight against crime and terrorism would be weakened."

This is the closest London comes to playing hardball. The British government, squaring up against 27 other capital cities, many of them convinced it must be made to pay for leaving, is in a relatively poor negotiating position. One of the cards it will seek to play is security, reminding EU states of the importance of counter-terrorism and defence cooperation at a time when

the threat level is acute. The word "security" was mentioned 11 times in the letter, compared to just six references to "trade", for example. To some ears, lines like this will sound like a threat, with May in effect saying: a return to WTO terms would be a disaster for us, but just think of the security fallout for the rest of the union if we fail to strike a deal.

"We understand and respect your position that the four freedoms of the single market are indivisible and there can be no 'cherry picking'."

The UK would dearly have liked to remain in the single market. Indeed, that was its opening position after the referendum. But it faced implacable opposition from Brussels and other EU capitals, who insisted that the "four freedoms" – free movement of goods, capital, services and people – were indivisible. That meant the price of single market membership was for London to continue to abide by EU immigration rules. Here, May is conceding the point at the outset of the formal negotiations. In a similar



vein, she goes on to acknowledge that the UK will lose influence over the rules that affect the European economy and that there will be "consequences" for the UK in leaving the bloc. She's not wrong. EU capitals may not speak of punishing the UK, but no club can offer the same attractive terms to outsiders as it does to members. Within an hour of May's speech, French president François Hollande (above) remarked that Brexit would be "painful" for the British.

"In particular, we must pay attention to the UK's unique relationship with the Republic of Ireland and the importance of the peace process in Northern Ireland."

Officials in Dublin had been assured that May's letter would highlight Irish concerns. And so it does.

May doesn't make any promises – how could she? – but her letter hits many of the key points causing anxiety on this side of the Irish Sea: the future of the Common Travel Area, the dangers of a hard Border, the consequences for the peace process and the Belfast Agreement. The "unique relationship"

between the UK and the Republic is a reference to the huge bilateral trade volumes and the Irish diaspora in Britain.

Absent, however, is any reference to the customs union between the two states.

The future of that arrangement will depend on the nature of whatever trade deal emerges between the UK and the EU – one of the most difficult issues for negotiators to resolve.

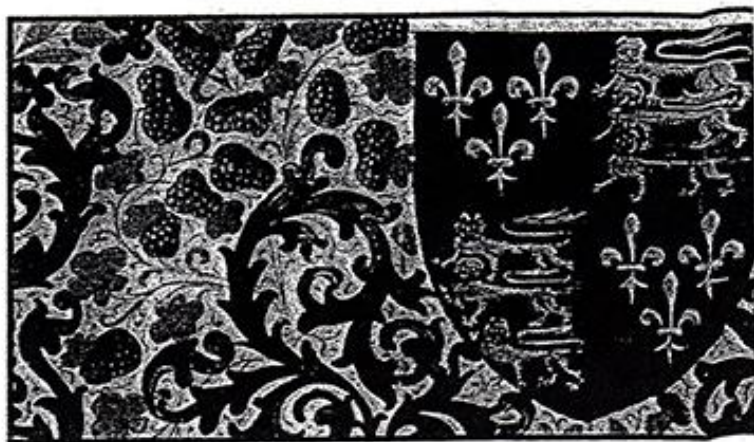


# THE LION AND THE UNICORN

The Royal Arms →  
of Her Majesty Queen  
Elizabeth II, quarter-  
ing the arms of  
England, Scotland  
and Ireland.



↑ The Royal Arms of England.



1155.. 7<sup>th</sup> only English POPE  
 POPE ADRIAN IV.  
 BULL LAUDABILITER.  
 HENRY II OF ENGLAND.

THE ROYAL ARMS used today by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II have evolved over nine centuries.

The Royal Arms of England (Gules, three Lions Passant Guardant Or) were first used by Richard the Lionheart and remained in use on their own until 1340 when King Edward III 'quartered' them with the Ancient Royal Arms of France (a blue shield Semé de lis) to symbolize his claim to the French throne. Henry IV changed the French quarter to show only three fleur-de-lis, known as 'France Modern', and they remained in this form until the reign of James I, who quartered them with the arms of Scotland and the harp of Ireland. The Hanoverian monarchs, who followed the house of Stuart, included in their arms heraldic references to their German possessions, including the famous white horse of Hanover. Queen Victoria adopted a simplified form of the Royal Arms which remain unchanged to this day.

The supporters to the Royal Arms have undergone many changes and have numbered falcons, yales, white lions, white boars, greyhounds, red dragons and, of course, the unicorn amongst their esteemed ranks.

The crown is the symbol of monarchy and sovereignty and as such has appeared in various styles in royal heraldry. It was not until the reign of Charles II that we see the heraldic crown we are familiar with today. It is based on St Edward's Crown.



← Detail from a 15th-century manuscript showing the Royal Arms of France Modern quartered with England, as used by all monarchs from Henry IV through to James I.



↑ The Royal Arms of James I.



↗ The arms of Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland, taken from his Great Seal.

St Edward's Crown, the crown used for coronations. ↘

