

4 October 2017

Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
Chair
Foreign Affairs Committee
Committee Office
House of Commons
London
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Foreign &
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King Charles Street
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Secretary of State

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan Toms," followed by a comma.

Thank you for your letter of 28 September drawing my attention to the timing of the government's responses to three Foreign Affairs Committee reports from the last Parliament and the Committee's wish to know why the FCO did not publish these earlier as Command Papers.

The responses to all of these reports (UK Relations with Turkey, UK Relations with Russia, and Political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood) were all due to be submitted to the Committee in May this year. This timing coincided with the period of Purdah, which began on 22 April, causing an enforced delay to the customary two month period for the FCO to submit responses.

The FCO considered publishing the reports as Command Papers but after careful consideration and a number of discussions with the Clerk of your Committee, my officials informed him that the reports would be submitted to the new Committee once formed. Although this would mean a delay in publication it would have the advantage of allowing our responses to the Committee to be up-to-date, an important consideration given the rate at which events in all three areas continually changed. It also ensured that any supplementary questions from the new Committee would be in response to the latest available information.

Although circumstances were not usual this year, Cabinet Office guidance allows for responses to be suspended over a summer recess after consultation with the Committee Clerk.

I know this delay was also raised in the House as a Point of Order in July and the Speaker stated that Ministers may take the view that as they were responding to a Committee they would only do so once a Committee was in place. This indeed was our view. I hope you accept that this was an unusual circumstance and our decision not to publish Command Papers was based on a desire to be open, transparent and helpful to the new Committee.

You also asked about the overdue response on Article 50 negotiations: implications of 'no deal'. As you mentioned in your letter this is a DExEU lead report and I understand that the government response is to be issued soon by that department.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson', with a stylized flourish below the name.

THE RT HON BORIS JOHNSON MP