

Ministers Reflect Baroness Anelay



26 June 2018

Biographical details

Parliamentary history

1996–present: Conservative Member of the House of Lords

Government career

2017: Minister of State (Department for Exiting the European Union)

2016: Minister of State (Department for International Development)

2016: Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

2014–17: Minister of State (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

2010–14: Chief Whip, House of Lords

Baroness Anelay was interviewed by Daniel Thornton and Tess Kidney Bishop on 26 June 2018 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect project.

Baroness Anelay reflects on the need to get more women into Parliament, on promoting human rights overseas, and on Brexit preparations and negotiations with the EU.

Daniel Thornton (DT): Perhaps we can start at the beginning of your involvement in the Conservative Party. How did that come about and what was your experience?

Baroness Anelay (BA): I started being interested in politics at school. I somewhat strangely found myself being forced to be the Liberal Democrat candidate at my grammar school, because everyone wanted to be the Conservative candidate, and therefore I wasn't allowed to do that or to be the agent; those places were taken. That gave me a great opportunity to learn far more about how you run elections. Also, how you need to be able to explain your position to people who can be very polite to you on the doorstep – in those days, it was the doorstep, it wasn't so much telephone canvassing – but just want to shoo you on and not give you the real answer. That was good, I think, as an introduction to politics as a whole, both in the party organisation and here in the House of Lords where you shouldn't take silence and a smile for consent. You need to explain and explore and persuade.

DT: Then in the 1990s, you became more heavily involved in politics?

BA: I started in the 80s, I was in the voluntary party. I didn't go for election because my first love at that time was really working with the Citizens Advice Bureau. And you couldn't be both a councillor and an adviser. Therefore, I was thoroughly prepared to be a volunteer in the party. I enjoyed the work as a volunteer, throughout the party, and ended up in the 90s as the Chair of the [Conservative] Women's Organisation and then automatically as a Vice-Chair of the party. I loved that because it gave me exposure for the first time to politics in other parts of the country. I'd known it around London and the South East. But for the first time, I was able to go to events in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, the Midlands, all over the place and participate there, and take part in by-elections, such as in Langbaugh where my now noble friend Michael Bates was elected in a by-election. And that really made me even more determined to continue in politics, to seeing this richness across the whole of the UK that we have an engagement in politics, in all the parties, not just the Tory party.

DT: What did you see of the role of women in the Conservative Party at that time?

BA: I used to get really cross with the way in which people assumed that it was women who were blocking the way for women to become candidates. I sat on a couple of the selection committees and on each of those the women were in the minority. It was the men who were rejecting candidates. Therefore, I welcomed the fact that we were able

to become more of a campaigning organisation, the women's organisation. Joan Seccombe as our Chair really made sure that happened, carried it on and then so did I.

But we still found that when it came to elections to Parliament, we fell woefully short of any women's representation in what were assumed to be winnable seats. Now, I never assume anything is really a winnable seat, you have to win it. But clearly we were not succeeding. We're still not as good as we should be. I was always against having all-women lists or having positive discrimination. But frankly, I think that the only way, in the end, you manage to make a move forward is by showing women you're serious about making sure that there's proper women's representation in Westminster. That's why I now feel we have got to look at some way of ensuring that there is at least one woman on every list, and I would hope two on every list so that when we have a better system of selection, we attract more candidates and there's more opportunity for them then to be elected. But also, Parliament needs to behave in a way where people feel they could be safe and secure in their person, even though in their politics they may be under attack. We've got a lot of work to do on that as well.

DT: Theresa May was obviously involved in promoting women as parliamentary candidates. When did you come across Theresa May?

BA: It must have been the early 90s, before she was elected. I was very much aware of her campaigning spirit, her absolutely indomitable spirit, and the fact that she is such a straightforward, honest person. When she says she'll do something, she does it. I found her marvellous to work with, both before I sat in Cabinet and then when I did sit in Cabinet for a couple of years. It was no surprise to me that she so firmly backed women to win and has continued to do so throughout her time as premier.

DT: Let's come up to 1996, when you entered the House of Lords. How did that come about?

BA: People assumed that I was appointed because I was a Vice-Chair of the Conservative Party, the Women's Chair. In fact, that hadn't happened before. It was a first. It certainly gave me the ability to be involved in policy discussions and to challenge what my party was thinking at the time. But what really happened was that I was working in the charitable sector, what is often now called the NGO [non-governmental organisation] sector, and because I was working so much for the Citizens Advice Bureau [CAB] and bringing forward policies to what was then the Department of Health and Social Security, I got on to the Social Security Advisory Committee [SSAC] and again got involved in policy making there. My work at the CAB meant that I had a meeting on policy with the then Secretary of State who turned round to me and said: "If you think this is so easy, that you know more than we do, then perhaps you ought to do something in the frontline about it." I said no more about that and then got a letter, asking me to join the SSAC.

DT: Which Secretary of State was that?

BA: John Moore of Lower Marsh.

DT: You had a variety of frontbench roles in the Lords. Could you talk us through those?

BA: I joined in November 1996, just before the terrible defeat that we suffered in 97. Therefore, I was only on the backbenches for a matter of months before I became an opposition whip in the Labour Government period. Whips here, in the House of Lords, perform very much the same kind of duties at the dispatch box as a minister. You don't have ministerial responsibilities, but in opposition it was very much a case of Shanks's pony. You do it all yourself. It's a great training ground. It can be quite scary, but we had a tremendous team, people who really did want to work together. Great variety: those from hereditary peers who had a back office, those hereditary peers who'd been lorry drivers and people like me, who are grammar school people, who just got on with it.

That was, for me, one of the greatest periods in my political life. I was learning how to write my own amendments. I had the advantage of knowing how to read bills, and understand the parliamentary process, because of the work I'd done in the Social Security Advisory Committee and in my work with the Citizens Advice Bureau. But working to a timetable here and knowing the procedure so that you could ensure that you worked out your objective and how to achieve it, that was new. The ability to do that, to decide what's your end game and work back, I think was the greatest lesson I learned and I kept that to the forefront of my mind as I then went into government later.

Of the range of jobs I did in opposition, for example, I found myself at one time our shadow spokesman for agriculture. I used to joke, but with some accuracy, there are around about seven or eight farms in Woking, most of which are mushroom farms. So my knowledge of agriculture was limited. And I am deeply grateful to the real professionals, the farmers, the National Union of Farmers, and all of those who made it their job to try to educate me and do it in a very effective way. So I found myself doing that. I was also a spokesperson and Shadow Minister on Home Affairs for a period of five years. That was a time when the Labour Government almost had a legislative diarrhoea on home affairs matters. So I spent most of my time in the Chamber. And in 2007, was appointed the Opposition Chief Whip. That gave me the opportunity to look across the whole piece about management of business in the Lords and that was fascinating.

Tess Kidney Bishop (TKB): In 2010, were you clear that you were going to continue as Chief Whip?

BA: Nobody should be clear they're going to continue in politics at any moment whatsoever. One of the most common questions I was asked when I travelled around the world as a Foreign Office Minister of State, was: "How long are you doing this job?" I

would point at my mobile phone and I would say: “Until I get the text message telling me that it’s over. Or somebody else tells me that it’s over.” And they would look shocked. I said: “No, in politics you never, ever assume.”

On one occasion when I did that in about 2016, it was a visit to Nigeria. I was in the High Commission residence with the High Commissioner, and we had a roundtable working dinner with people from DfID [Department for International Development] and others responsible for our defence in the area. Having been asked that question and done the usual answer, pointing at the phone, within seconds one of the members of the High Commission staff popped their head around the door and said: “Minister, the Foreign Secretary wants to speak to you on behalf of the Prime Minister.” You could have heard a pin drop in that room, at that moment. I had to say: “Will you excuse me?” In fact, when I went upstairs and spoke to Philip Hammond, what I was being asked to do was to temporarily take on a minister of state job at the then Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, while we were waiting for Mark Price [Minister of State 2016–17] to join us. But it was quite a moment.

But in 2010, did I expect to continue? I hoped to. But you should never expect. And I think that’s the mistake some people make. They think they’re going to continue in their work because they’ve been successful. There are so many moving parts in government and as a Chief Whip, either in opposition or government, you see those moving parts when it comes to reshuffles. There was the added complication that we had, for the first time in my lifetime, a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats and the hope that the Conservative opposition team would all continue into ministerial office was clearly going to be blown to smithereens. Because you’re restricted as to the number of paid posts you can have. You could have some unpaid but there are limitations to what you can do, under the rules. Therefore, I knew that there would have to be some dramatic changes. I also knew that David Cameron had made it clear to all of us in the Conservative Party that in going into coalition with the Liberal Democrats, we should be “generous”, that was one of the words he used. I hoped he wasn’t going to be too generous with my job.

On the Thursday of the week of the reshuffle, I got the phone call from David Cameron to ask me to continue as Chief Whip, but in government. That was wonderful. It was absolutely wonderful. It was also one of the most turbulent times in politics because we had some bills that we would take over from the Labour Government, we had some which we had agreed, which had to start from scratch, putting into effect promises that you’d made to get elected, and we had to accommodate agreement with the Liberal Democrats, all against the background of a Labour Party that was steamingly furious. I don’t think people outside this House ever got a feeling of how angry the Labour Party was that the Liberal Democrats had refused at the last minute to be in coalition with them. We saw some scenes and noises in the chamber which we don’t normally see or hear. Therefore, the experience I’d had in listening, talking, persuading – boy, did I need that.

TKB: Apart from those changes in the politics, what were the other changes to your role in moving from the Opposition to Government Chief Whip?

BA: Responsibility. In opposition, you can afford to get something wrong. In government, you can't. You have a responsibility to the country as a whole. You have a responsibility to the Prime Minister and the Government itself. You cannot afford to get anything wrong. Therefore, you take far more care.

You have a huge amount of support from the civil service, which you don't have in opposition. You do have some researchers in opposition – I didn't have any myself, but the current Labour Opposition use their funding very well indeed to have some admin support, research support. I admire the way they do that. But in government, you have this tremendous professional background, a civil service that we should be proud of. Sometimes people criticise and cavil it, but travelling around the world, it's extraordinary the strengths of ability and patience we have in civil servants here. It doesn't mean to say you have to do everything they advise, but they give you the alternatives. Maybe, for instance, like the CAB [Citizens Advice Bureau], the civil service might say: "This is what's happening now, this is what might happen in the future, these are the options of action and these are some of the potential results of those options. Up to you, gov, what you do next. On your head be it, if you get it wrong, but these are the options." That was the huge difference for me.

The other difference was the speed at which things can happen. Sometimes it feels so slow that you're infuriated. In practice, it happens very fast. The slowness is down to the need for secretaries of state to use their special advisers to go through everything just to check they think it's right for them. And to have Cabinet responsibility, where all the Cabinet signs everything off, so you have to go through that Cabinet write-round. But when you're a minister, the volume of work and the speed of work is really phenomenal. If you find it overwhelming, I think that's up to you. You have to find ways of dealing with it. I loved it, because for me it was a way of life. But then the House of Lords had been a way of life. It's not necessarily a good thing, but it made me perhaps more prepared for government than others might have been. Particularly I think those who've had real success in business, particularly entrepreneurial people, because they're used to making a decision and saying "do this" and it's done and then they move on. In government, you have to invite others to work with you to achieve something and you can never move on, because there's always the next stage. Whether it's the National Health Service, social security matters, you're talking about individuals and you are trying to treat them as groups. That's a huge responsibility: to see the people behind the groups, behind the theory.

TKB: How were you working with the Lib Dem Whips in that time?

BA: I was lucky in one respect. First of all that their existing Chief Whip was also carried on by Nick Clegg, and became my deputy. So I knew him. I knew how different we were in politics, but I knew we could work together. I was also fortunate in that David Cameron and our then leader here [in the Lords], Tom Strathclyde, said to me: “You organise the Whip’s Office as you want.” And I decided that we would be completely integrated. At first, the Lib Dems were pleased, to some extent, to have a joint whip’s meeting but they still wanted to have their separate and our separate meetings. But after two or three weeks, it was always a joint government whip’s meeting.

The Liberal Democrats’ party organisation is different from the Tories’. It’s very heavily based in committee meetings and having group meetings. That suits them, it wouldn’t suit us. Some of their time was certainly taken up on that during the week. But we could work round that in the diaries, because we had wonderful civil servants who made it work. It was difficult for them, because it took the Lib Dems away from their government work, but it worked. And without exception, the people who became Liberal Democrat Whips were superb at the dispatch box and that’s what you need. Because here, the whips are ministers in the Whips’ Office. They have a very strong role at the dispatch box. Sometimes they will be the lead spokesperson, as Lindsay Northover was, very successful too, and she then later became a minister.

So I had a really good team to call upon. Not as big at the beginning as it should have been because Nick Clegg seemed to forget about the House of Lords, and therefore didn’t get as many appointments as we would have perhaps expected. We tried to ensure at least the Whips’ Office group was increased, so we could reflect the ability of people on their benches. I ended up, when I was Minister of State at the Foreign Office, with one of the best people as my whip you could possibly have, which was William Wallace. Goodness me, if anybody could be a minister at the Foreign Office, he could. I knew that we could work very well together, although we had very different views on some things.

DT: Speaking of different views, the Coalition agreement gave you some headwind and various things went, relatively speaking, straightforwardly through the Lords. But there were some bumps in the road. Could you talk us through those?

BA: The first bump in the road was the first vote we had here, which we lost. It was on a series of orders about local government to do with Norfolk and the South West. The Labour Government had brought in a system to which we objected and we said we would overturn it in government. We brought it forward and there was an argument over whether it was a hybrid resolution. It’s typical in the House of Lords, we can become completely hung up on procedure. Sometimes that’s a good idea, provided you then obey what the procedure is. We lost the vote because people decided not to

accept the advice of the clerks. I thought that was unwise because they are the legal advisers to the whole House, not just the Government.

That was a real wake up call for the House of Lords: don't think that just because there is a coalition, it has a majority, because it didn't. No government in this House has had a majority for a long time. In fact, even in the 1980s, when we had the hereditary peers, there were still one or two defeats. You have to think about what you are doing, and how you are going to explain it to people, including on something like university tuition fees, which wasn't a walk in the park. We still had to explain. We have a large cross-bench group, nearly 200, they're not simply going to vote one way or the other. Though occasionally, you do hear them coming into the chamber to ask "Which way are we voting?", which is a bit unsettling. That's only a few of them I hope. But it's not a House you can take for granted, ever.

DT: That was the first bump. There were some others, mainly towards the end of the Coalition.

BA: Yes. We had a lot of ping-pong on welfare reform, which ultimately went through. David Freud [then Minister of State for Welfare Reform] was a remarkable person. He knew more about the system than anybody else, not only theory, but in practice. He used to go round the offices around the country, just seeing how they were implementing some of the trial runs. I can't remember exactly how many groups we had, I think it was about 10. We didn't finish until about one forty in the morning on that ping-pong but it was a success. It was a piece of legislation that went into Grand Committee, because it was a technical bill – people sometimes think nothing's technical, that was really technical – and also because it meant that we could have more accommodation for disabled members of the public to be able to see it. There was quite a furore at the time about how on earth could the House of Lords put something into the Grand Committee, off the floor of the House, where you can't vote. The fact is it meant that they could have longer and disabled people, particularly those using wheelchairs, had proper access in the Grand Committee which they wouldn't have had ordinarily. But we ended up with all the votes then at report stage, at the third reading, and ping-pong as a result because it concertinas them into one.

DT: We interviewed Baroness Stowell and one of the things she said about life as a Lords minister was that she felt that sometimes the civil service didn't support Lords ministers as comprehensively as other ministers, particularly when you were a whip who was also a spokesperson.

BA: I think that she's actually differentiated between two areas there.

Lords ministers who are in a department are there every day, unless you are travelling as I was a lot as a Foreign Office Minister. But you are there, you are rooted there, and the office has a structure of being able to work towards that minister. It's up to that minister whether they get as good a service as the Commons members. I know there

were some ministers who said they don't get that support. I think that's down to them, frankly. I think you need to be able to clear very early on with your office about the way in which you wish to work. They will adapt to that and then you don't need to watch everything they do, you just need to be sure that you're being delivered with the kind of briefing you want, and the kind of timetable you want and you need to have a relationship with your Secretary of State which means you don't get sidelined. It's all too easy for a Lords minister to feel slighted when they shouldn't be. Use the 'five-minute manager' system to get on at meetings with your Commons colleagues. Don't let them rabbit on about their questions in Commons until there are two minutes left at the end. Make sure you get your stuff in early and then you'll be okay.

For Lords whips, Baroness Stowell is right. There is an issue that Lords whips are working in two or three departments. It's difficult for them to get that kind of status where the department really feels they're working to them, unless they have a lead spokesperson. Even then it's difficult, because the whip is here from two thirty every day, even before, for a long time, until the House is up. They're not rooted in their department and I think it is much more difficult for Lords whips to feel they get a very good service. Because Lords whips now do more answers to questions than they used to, they have an opportunity to get a better service, because they can have their file for their question in any structure they want. They need to work out what suits them. An absolutely superb example of someone who did that: at the end of her career, Baroness Trumpington became a whip, having been a minister. She didn't want to leave government, was happy to stay in John Major's Government as a whip. If you saw her preparation file for questions, she got exactly what she wanted. No bad example.

DT: You had two Foreign Secretaries while you were in the Foreign Office. Could you contrast how they managed their ministerial teams?

BA: Yes. They have a different approach, clearly, as is visible every single day of the week. Philip Hammond has a great ability to internalise everything and he has an analytical mind, which is very calm and quiet but is working like mad inside. With Boris [Johnson], you see on the outside what is going on on the inside.

Philip Hammond was very organised, very much prepared to let you get on with what you were doing. He would question it, for example, when there was the issue about whether I would take over the role of William Hague, when he retired from the House of Commons, as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. Would I do that or would it simply disappear altogether? It was a case of prove the value of the job. Not yourself, the question of "Can you do it?" comes second but prove the value of the job because it's cost. And by proving the value of the work, I continued [in that role]. Watching him at the management board for the Foreign Office, you could see that analytical mind coming into play and seeing a very long-term result. Like any politician, he's very ambitious. In the House of Commons, they have reason to be ambitious. I used to joke, but a serious joke, that when I sat around the

Cabinet table, I used to look at Tina Stowell and think she and I are the only ones here who don't have an ambition to be Prime Minister, because we can't be. That's it. There is a cut-off point.

With Boris Johnson, what you see is what you get, absolutely. His views about equality are phenomenal. His campaign for the 12 years of quality education for girls didn't just come off the policy shelf, where it was, it's part of him. You see a gender equality campaign throughout his own work and throughout the way in which he is carrying on working in the Foreign Office. And we needed to improve that. A book has just come out which shows how women working in the Foreign Office started as the 'necessary women', who would clean up the loos, to now being our ambassadors.

For diplomats, I think the different styles from Philip to Boris took a little bit of getting used to. But diplomats can adapt to anything.

DT: Was there a weekly meeting of the ministers?

BA: There should be. Unless the Foreign Secretary is travelling, that's the usual idea. Occasionally it wouldn't happen because there might be an emergency, an extra Cabinet meeting, something else, but usually there would be one in the morning so that there shouldn't be interruption from other events. But 'events, dear boy, events', as they say. Pretty old phrase.

DT: Was that just with the special advisers [spads] or with civil servants as well?

BA: The spads were there. The only civil servant there would be the head of the Secretary of State's office, the Principal Private Secretary, who should never be underestimated because they are the brightest of the bright.

DT: How did the agenda work for those meetings?

BA: Fortunately, by the time I joined the Foreign Office, Philip Hammond had divorced the interminable discussion about House of Commons questions from the main agenda. They had a pre-meeting on that, so you could actually deal with business. You'd have a report from each member of the ministerial team about the main work that they'd been doing and where the challenges still lay, the long-term impact of that. But after you'd gone around the table, there was always an 'any other business'. Which meant that anybody who felt they'd not had a chance to get in could do so. Under Boris, that worked better than it did under Philip, I would say. I think because with Philip, he was moving on; with Boris, he was staying.

But also [Boris used] what I would call another 'five-minute manager' effect. Whether he knows about it or not and he just does it naturally, I do not know. But it's very effective. At meetings, as you would know if you've ever read the book, you go through the formal business of the meeting, but when you have something that is really crucial to you, that is sensitive and difficult and you don't want it to disrupt the rest of the

meeting, you wait until the meeting is over, you get up and as you get up you say “Oh, by the way...”, and then you raise a question. It might be, for example, about the ivory trade, and then you sit down and you talk about the implications. It’s a remarkably effective way of getting things done. I used it as Chief Whip.

TKB: You mentioned getting the call to do the Trade and Investment job briefly, and you were also briefly a minister at DfID.

BA: Yes. Again with DfID, that was always going to be briefly alongside the Foreign Office.

TKB: So how did you manage those periods?

BA: With great difficulty. And only because it was mostly a period when Parliament did not sit.

First of all, the short period at the Department of Trade, I shorten the name [of UK Trade and Investment] to Department of Trade, was mostly a matter of dealing with the answers to written questions. By chance, there happened to be no questions in the Lords that I, as a minister, would have to answer and most of it fell over the Easter recess. But it would have been difficult if it had continued. The good part about it was that when I went to Colombia, I was able to combine the work I was doing on human rights and peace and security with the work on trade, because I went to Barranquilla, where there had just been the oil and gas conference. So that fitted in quite well.

Going to DfID, when the Prime Minister phoned me to ask if I would do that until a new minister was appointed in October, of course you say yes. People think that it would sit side by side easily, and I know that now ministers do do it as a joint operation. But I found that very difficult in House of Lords terms because in the House of Lords, you are answering questions, urgent questions, statements, almost every day of the week. To do that, and your overseas travel for both DfID and the Foreign Office – I would find it untenable, myself. That summer it meant that I didn’t have a holiday, obviously, you just go into the department. I had tremendous support in DfID, as they do for new ministers in departments, but it was exceptional. Adam there was superb. And the team got me through the summer. But if I had continued beyond Parliament sitting again in October, for any length of time, I think that my work here in the Lords would have been at risk. Because you can never take the Lords for granted, as I said earlier. You have to prepare so well for business. And of course I knew that I was going to take the European Union Referendum Bill through here, I was the lead on that, and that takes your whole life. When you are leading on the bill, it is a campaign, from start to finish. Tina Stowell has used that phrase about taking a bill through as a campaign, and it is.

DT: While you were in the Foreign Office, you straddled the EU referendum campaign and the result. How did that work inside government?

BA: I've always been somebody who felt that being part of the EU was just where we were. From the point of view of 'Did I feel I was European?', I would just say: "I am British, but I do feel European because it is part of our history." And I campaigned for the Remain side.

The more we went into the campaign, the more concerned I was first of all that the demographics were showing that we were relying, almost entirely, upon groups of people in the Labour Party who were in the North and North East to win because of the way in which the vote was split elsewhere. Therefore, I could see why the gap was so narrow in all the pundits' projections. But the real concern I had was the way in which it was splitting people apart. You could see it in families that it wasn't just young people feeling differently from older people at all, it wasn't as simplistic as that. You could see it here [in the Lords]. It got to the point where one of my oldest friends and I simply didn't talk about foreign affairs matters because we didn't want to argue. We were on either side of the fence on this and there was no way we were going to agree, so we avoided talking about it. That made me more worried than ever about how the country would react, whatever the result was. Therefore, when I went into the campaign to take the bill through, I did it in a straightforward way, to say that the people have decided, democracy is better than the result, it may be a kick in the teeth, but you get on with it. And I really believe that.

When the result came through, it was like grieving. As soon as the first couple of results came through on that Friday night, I thought "That's it, we've lost," being the Remain side, and I went to bed. Because I could see from the target seats that we needed to win, it was over. And that weekend, it was like grief. Then you think: right, this is it. You get on with it, you deliver to the country. Coming back in on the Monday, I knew that we would then be in a position where there would be debates here, there would have to be legislation to put it into effect, and you get on with it. You deliver what people want and you do the best you can and you do it in the most open way you can, given that a lot of negotiations have to be confidential because there are commercial issues that arise out of them. But it was one of the most difficult years of my political life, seeing the way in which people are genuinely hurt by the result. I've grown up as member of the Tory party with people asking me: "Who's the next leader of the Tory party going to be?" It doesn't go away. We are very good at killing off our leaders. I am very good at campaigning to make sure we keep them for as long as we can.

DT: In the Foreign Office, you had to represent the Government's position to other governments. How did that work?

BA: When I went to the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office], I was asked to major on human rights – Minister to the UN would mean Minister of Human Rights internationally. During the period, the portfolio grew. So I had international energy security, climate change, a tremendous range and I loved it. So when I travelled to talk about human rights – my last visit was to South Sudan, last May – that can be one of the most challenging things you do. People think that human rights are nice and fluffy. But human rights go to the core of what kind of government should there be, what should the life of every single person in the country be, what could their freedoms be, not only could, what should they be and what is the difference between. So in talking to other governments, I just loved being able to shock them, encourage them and avoid condemning, where I could do so, but condemn where I needed to, to point out where they were going wrong, to argue the case for people who are held in prison wrongly, not necessarily only when they are British, but other people as well, on human rights grounds. And it was remarkable how good a response you could still get by being open about what you mean to say. One of the greatest, I suppose, bits of praise I had from my own department was that I was good at delivering a difficult message. That's what it's about.

DT: You had to deliver some difficult messages in South Sudan.

BA: Certainly. One of the most difficult countries that there is to live in. It has oil fields in the north, it has a continuing civil war. The only time it was together was when it was fighting Sudan. As soon as it became independent, within a short period, that unity fell apart. Going there makes you, if I can use the word, grieve. Grieve for how things can go wrong and don't really need to.

The one sign I had of hope was when we had a day's roundtable work with young people. At the beginning of the day, because they're not used to being able to speak freely, particularly young men and particularly in front of different groups, political groups as well as different ethnic groups, it was difficult to have a conversation. By the end of the day, they were being forthright and able to express themselves. I've no doubt that when they went home, they went back to the security of their own group. But we need to try and bring them out of that. Because at the moment, there's no doubt it's a political battle. It's not an ethnic battle, or a religious battle, it's a political battle for power and control and it's an exceptionally vicious one as well.

One meeting that I attended at the army headquarters, one of the other people there was a general on whom we've imposed sanctions and I was sanctions minister at the time. I have no doubt about why sanctions are needed against some people, no doubt.

DT: Coming back to the EU, after the referendum I suppose it was natural for many people in the Foreign Office, having been representing the advantages of the UK being a member of the EU for a long time, to not necessarily warmly embrace the idea of leaving the EU. How did you find that environment?

BA: Like our ex-Permanent Under-Secretary who has been voluble about his disappointment. I use the same word “disappointment”, which is one he would have used. He was an exceptionally able man of course, as you would expect. I hope I might in the future, might be able to say of a perm sec of the Foreign Office, “an exceptionally able woman” as well. There are some good ones on the way up, as there always are, some exceptional ones. Let’s hope they get there.

But any change of direction by government, it is like the old *Knight Rider*. The car gets to a corner and just goes boom, left, violently. And that’s what can happen on something like Europe. It’s no case of gently pulling away the little tendrils. You have to cut the ivy out by the root, while still, at the root of the ivy, giving the country the opportunity to remain close friends with the rest of Europe and beyond, and to have a relationship which means that business could still function in effectively as much the same way as it always has. To make sure it has as successful a future as it would have, if not better. That abrupt change, coming at a time when people weren’t expecting the other kind of abrupt change we had with the change of government, is really very difficult indeed. All credit to the civil service – they are managers of change – that they were able to adapt.

It took a little while at the Foreign Office for the shock to sink in, you could see that, because like our ex-perm sec there, they genuinely believed in the European model and therefore were genuinely wondering how, for the first time in their lifetime, could they see something different. I’ve lived through the non-EU period, I can see something different and see how we’ve changed since that period, to make sure the future can be really good outside Europe. But getting through that change, that management of change, the institutional change, is really very difficult. Nobody should underestimate that.

When I went to DExEU [Department for Exiting the EU] last summer, what really encouraged me was that the civil servants there had volunteered to be there, they knew what tough work they were getting into. And they’d done a phenomenal amount of work in the year before I got there working out all the various options and what the pros and cons would be and what kind of software would be needed for the various options and where the glitches might be. There had been a real hum of activity and as I got there, more and more people were being recruited and volunteering. When I’d been at the dispatch box in the Foreign Office, I used to say the phrase we were given which I believed but didn’t see it at the time, which is: “We are recruiting the best from across Whitehall and from outside Whitehall.” Well, when I went to DExEU, I went to a meeting in the first week with all the staff, there were then just about 400, more coming up. I looked at them and I said: “Now I can see them. Here they are.” The

people who have volunteered to walk into the toughest jobs we have faced, from all walks of life. Then I got briefings from them and I used to go home to my husband saying “Goodness me. This person who’s just been advising me, this lawyer”, and I’d look at their CV and what they’d been doing: “This is amazing that they want to come and be a part of this really difficult project, because they see it as the greatest challenge of their life.” It gave me the confidence that it would work out.

DT: From what you saw in government, were you confident that preparations were proceeding well?

BA: Provided that Cabinet can actually agree itself. I go back to my time as a member of the Tory party, as a volunteer: you can knock peoples’ heads together when they don’t find a way of agreeing. And that goes for every single member of the Cabinet. They need to think of a common purpose, which shouldn’t mean that they all want to be Prime Minister. They need to think of the common purpose of having a country which is so at ease with itself and flourishing, in human rights and in the economy, that it’s a country that will want to vote for them.

TKB: What were your impressions of how the team of ministers were working together at DExEU? There had been some turnover before you entered.

BA: There’s always a turnover. The word reshuffle strikes dread into everybody’s heart. I was fortunate in just one respect that I chose the time of my own leaving. I wish I had not got out of a helicopter so badly in Bosnia Herzegovina to wreck my ankle and my knees at the time, but that was my fault for not getting it seen to. But ultimately, I chose to leave. For others, it’s always a case of how well are they performing now, where do they move onto next, how do they fit into this perpetually moving machine. One of the great advantages of being a Lords minister is you are not a competitor for the Commons ministers. I think one of the ways in which you can get strength as a Lords minister in the team is by making them not only know that, but realise that what you are trying to do is make the whole team work well. Therefore, if they could only get on with each other, it would be even better. But behind all this is one crucial aspect which I’ve never forgotten, though some Lords ministers perhaps might, which is in the Commons, you’ve got to win an election. We don’t [in the Lords]. Yet.

TKB: There’s been another minister added to DExEU since you left. Did you feel the department needed another?

BA: I think it was essential, yes. When the department was set up, it was because the negotiations hadn’t begun, the preparations for negotiations were taking place, but they hadn’t actually been launched. When I was there, it was absolutely crystal clear that you needed the full complement, the normal number of ministers. Therefore, when I left, I was delighted that David Davis’s [Secretary of State for Exiting the EU] discussion with the Prime Minister bore fruit, and they did get that minister. Not the extra minister, but the minister that made the full complement.

Nobody should underestimate the amount of travelling that has to be done. I know that the press had a bit about people jumping on and off planes to go around Europe. But there's nothing like sitting across a table and talking to somebody, getting a point across. You can do all you like, by video, all you like by email. The only way you get trust is by looking at somebody and being with them rather than just having a phone call where you know it's probably being listened to – I'm just thinking of some of the people I've spoken to around the world in not so free countries – by henchmen and henchwomen sitting either side to make sure the person doesn't say something that they don't want them to. So seeing is believing.

DT: In terms of the preparation you saw across government, because DExEU is responsible for co-ordinating the preparation plans, did you see a variable performance between departments?

BA: Certainly when I got there, that was the case. But it changed dramatically last summer. Departments that had really been faced by an overwhelming potential number of statutory instruments, and had not been quite getting into gear, were getting to grips with that. One shouldn't underestimate what's involved in doing that as well as continuing with your, as I call it, normal departmental work. So if you're something like Defra [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs], you face a tremendous challenge. They've got to grips with that. They nominated one member of each of their ministerial teams to be the timekeeper, I suppose, on statutory instrument progress so that one could work out which statutory instruments could be introduced in advance of us leaving the EU, what the timescale would be, the level of complexity – because so many of these are really a case of changing the name, or excluding a name, leaving the EU out – and making sure that these can be grouped in a way that they were then going to be manageable through the parliamentary process. We had a meeting here in the House of Lords, convened by our leader, and the purpose of that was for me and representatives of other ministerial groups to talk about the progress on statutory instruments and how we were co-ordinating on that. It was clear from that meeting how suddenly, last summer when the negotiations started, everything then kicked into gear. Preparations had been there, but some of the acceleration hadn't.

DT: But the EU Withdrawal Bill has taken longer than originally planned...

BA: Yes, it certainly has. I would have hoped that it would have reached this House, the House of Lords, for its second reading before Christmas. That was what I was hoping for when I was looking at the bill this time last year. I had worked out, as I said earlier, the end game from the point of view of when it would finish and therefore predicated on that, what would happen next to other legislation and the statutory instruments. That hasn't happened and I've no doubt that's made the Government's task more difficult.

In this House certainly, there were elements who were trying to take out extra time. They've very loudly said they weren't filibustering, and in the technical sense they were

not, and they were passionate about what they were saying, I've absolutely no doubt about that. But in trying to ensure that the committee stage went beyond the Easter period, they were trying to fatally damage the bill, no doubt in my mind about that as an individual, in the way I've seen Parliament over the 20 years I've been here. To the credit of the Labour Opposition, who after all do want to try and win an election in the future, they kept to the normal rules of business management and gave an agreement that we would sit late and complete committee stage by Easter. And that means they've got the best of both worlds, frankly. They got the ability for people to table vast numbers of amendments, which have nothing to do with the bill whatsoever but within our wide rules here are permissible. It had meant that people didn't vote at committee stage, they had time to debate. They did vote at report stage. And the other side of it was that they kept their backbenchers happy, and crossbenchers and others, who were very much wanting to remain. The other side of the coin is they showed their responsibility meant they could still damage the bill because it still was delivered later than it should have been. But on the other hand, the delaying of the bill reaching here was because in the Commons there wasn't overall agreement. So we suffered from a lack of agreement there too.

DT: Do you think the necessary legislation will be in place by March next year?

BA: This transitional or implementation period, whichever word one now wants to use – I would always use the word implementation, I can see people now use transitional, whatever floats your boat – is to provide business in the country the opportunity to adapt and only have one big change, not have lots of changes which could be damaging. Some of the legislation does not need to be in place by then. Some of it must be. I know some people think: "Ah well, in that case, we can just stay in the European Union." We've given a commitment, we are going to leave March 29 next year, and we will leave. So this House and the Commons have got to get through some legislation which is essential by that period. It's going to be a long winter.

DT: You were a minister over the period that Olly Robbins moved from DExEU to Downing Street...

BA: Yes. I was puzzled when I went to DExEU that suddenly there were these two perm secs. I'd never come across this before. How on earth does that work? The reality is once you go into negotiations, it doesn't. Because Olly Robbins clearly had to be in the negotiations, and therefore I could see why that then was changed. But it doesn't mean to say he's suddenly not in the mix. He's part of the whole organisation, just as is the Prime Minister, because she has the final backstop responsibility. Therefore, everything agreed in DExEU is in agreement with Downing Street. I knew very well that when I was answering statements here, answering questions here, that what I said ultimately would have to be something that the Prime Minister as well as David Davis was going to agree with. I worked with David Davis in opposition for a few years, in home affairs. I have the greatest respect for him, great respect for the fact that he works very hard. He has this

wonderful laid-back appearance but he works extremely hard and he's very effective at winning an argument. I like working with him.

TKB: Those few months were a busy time at DExEU because you started negotiations, there was the PM's Florence speech. How much visibility did you have on those big decisions or announcements?

BA: I had visibility of the big decisions. As a junior minister, you don't have visibility about the lead up. You have visibility about the information that goes into it. But you are not normally party to the actual final decision, because it's going to be a Cabinet one. So I could certainly see throughout the whole of the last summer all the draft papers that we were going to put out on whether it was customs arrangement, whatever you want to call it, all the various issues about a legal transfer. That was how I spent my summer, looking at every single paper. The difference between DExEU and other departments was very stark. That is that every minister saw everything whereas in other departments you would see only those parts of the decision-making process that really applied to your portfolio. But in DExEU, it was all encompassing. But you didn't take part in the actual discussions themselves, because David Davis would have discussion with his team, get our view, take that into account and then it would be part of the Cabinet discussion. When I was sitting in Cabinet, I could see parts of that, before I was at DExEU and Theresa May became Prime Minister. But even then, you could see there had been pre-meetings with other groups before they came to a common view.

From the point of view of what visibility do you have about the effect of it, the discussions that lead to the great speech that the Prime Minister made, I was exposed to that because I was asked to do the diplomatic work at DExEU of travelling. I found that led on very well from being at the Foreign Office. So I spent a lot of time going to countries across the European Union and I saw the impact that her speech had on them. It brought home to me how important it was to give any certainty at all, in a world that couldn't be certain until it finalised the negotiations. It also made me realise how willing the rest of the EU27 are to work with us, but how the unity they feel, imposed by Brussels and imposed by their chance of survival, means that they have then to close down. It's like a flower opening up during the day to talk to you about the common views that you have, the way they can have deals with you in the future. And then at night, when they get the phone call from the Commission, the flower closing down and being out of sight. There are one or two countries, as we know, who clearly held up the advance from the initial discussions to getting on beyond money to something else. So unfortunately, we weren't able to get through that period in early October, we couldn't do that until December. You can see the power play going on across Europe. For me, it was one of the most fascinating political times in my life, to see that power play first hand.

DT: You mentioned earlier that you thought the Lords had to move on in terms of the role women played and the environment in the Lords. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

BA: I think across Parliament we need to move on. We still have only here a third of the members are women. Partly that's due to the fact we have 90 or so people who are hereditary peers, of whom now only one is a woman. But even if you take that out of the mixture, the fact that we are older and the appointments used to be mostly of men, means that we have a smaller group of women than we should in today's age. They perform a much greater part in the role of the House of Lords than the numbers would suggest. We have a woman Leader of the Lords, a woman Leader of the Opposition. When I was a government Chief Whip, there as a time we had two leaders, one Chief Whip and the Lord Speaker as a woman. But we shouldn't take that headline as obscuring the fact that women don't play a large enough part in getting the appointments to the House of Lords, and the last group didn't include enough women. We need more.

But the real question, I think, is how do we ensure that there are more women in the House of Commons too. Because as a woman working in the House of Lords, you can adjust a business life to fit with the timings. It's difficult, particularly at some times of the year when there are heavy voting periods, but you can do it. In the Commons it is far more difficult.

I also think that in the House of Lords, there isn't the same kind of pressure on women, on the internet, for example, as there has been in the House of Commons where clearly there has been vileness over the internet, quite extraordinary vileness to people and danger. Jo Cox is a very, very sad example of when that can go to the absolute extreme. I think we need to ensure that in our own behaviour in Parliament, we have to behave in a way which shows we are respectful. I don't think people attacking each other – a phrase from my childhood would be slagging each other off – in public can help terribly much.

DT: What advice would you give to a Lords minister or whip about how to manage the Lords?

BA: Take them seriously, every second of the day. Don't rush into a debate or a question, without having had a proper briefing, thinking about it. Think and think again. Some of them will be greater experts than you ever can be. So no matter how confident you are, make sure you explain carefully your point of view and be ready for some opposition and for how you live through that, because we are all here for life. Those opposing you don't just disappear.

DT: What is your advice to ministers working on Brexit?

BA: Advice for ministers on Brexit: don't give up. Because they're doing the right thing. I would now vote to leave. I changed my view when I was at DExEU. I certainly wanted to work for leaving the European Union because that's what the vote was. But while I was there and while I travelled around Europe and while I got to know the Commission, I changed my view about how successful this country will be outside the European Union. I believe it can be done. And it will be.

TKB: As you've said, it makes a big difference that you chose when to leave government, but what was the experience of leaving government like, after almost a decade in?

BA: It is a shock to be a backbencher, because I've been on the frontbench for over 20 years. I was in a Labour history book that maintained that I was the longest continuously serving woman on the frontbench in either House of any party at that time: 20 and a half years. I did have a quick look and realised that Theresa May would then be the longest serving when I left. I don't mind her being that, that's alright, thank you very much.

It's difficult when you come in in the first place because you are learning what the place is about. You think you know because you've been in politics, but there's so much you don't really know. You're trying to make sure that you contribute well, but it's difficult to know when to take part and when just to keep quiet. So that's difficult. As an ex-minister, people do want to hear from you but they don't. There's this attitude on the backbenches that they respect what you've done as a minister, but they don't want to lose their jobs on select committees, they don't want to lose their right to be speaking near the top in debates. They want a bit of humility from ex-ministers. On the other hand, they don't want the minister to be humble, because they want the minister to stand up for what they spoke for as a minister. So it's an interesting time.

I must say for me, the first shock was actually deciding myself what I could do and when. I've always thought "I ought to do this" and I thought "No, there's no ought any more, I can actually decide myself." A bit like being in opposition, but supporting the government is what I would say. And because I work so much on the preventing sexual violence initiative, and human rights, I found that there was so much I could do with the all-party groups and debates to be able to continue to fight for the things that I'd always believed in before I came to the House of Lords, while I was a minister and now. That's what I am absolutely loving doing, being able to stand up for other people's rights.

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