

A WTO exit Cabinet

We are told today the Cabinet meets to review and progress preparations for the UK to leave the EU next March without signing a Withdrawal Agreement. Many Ministers and officials have been working on this contingency plan ever since we voted to leave the EU. Preparations should by now be well advanced. Today the Cabinet needs to set out a programme for telling us all of their success in ensuring things work smoothly on March 30th next year, and in giving helpful guidance about how trade will be progressed and transport will continue to move.

Ministers should be confident that the arrangements they are putting in place will work, and sensibly reassuring that in many cases things will continue just as they are the day before we leave. The Transport Secretary has set out in detail that the planes will continue to fly after March 29th, and that everyone who wishes can book their business trip or their holiday with confidence for next year after exit. Air Services Agreements are being put in place.

Work is well advanced at Calais to handle customs and any additional checks required without undue delays for trucks. Calais wishes to keep the business and is well aware of the competitive threat from Belgian and Dutch ports if they were not capable of handling lorries with good transit times. The Republic of Ireland is very keen Calais gets its act together, as substantial volumes of Irish goods use the roads of the UK as a land bridge to get things to and from the continent more quickly than going by a longer sea ferry route. They wish to see rapid transit times at Calais as well as us. French exporters to the UK also have a strong interest in Calais working smoothly and efficiently. We need to be told of the various Ro Ro and container options and arrangements so trade continues to flow.

The NHS needs to continue importing pharmaceuticals from the continent under existing contracts. These drugs are all licenced and approved, and already need to come to the UK with proper reporting of how and where they were made, what the tests results were and how they conform with the standards required. The Health Secretary needs to confirm he has ensured this will continue in good time. There should not be a need for additional stockpiles if he has done his job properly for the NHS.

I know of no supermarket that thinks it will be short of food in April. Ministers should spell out what if any additional checks are needed and how they have put in capacity to ensure these take place without delaying imports.

Ministers are employed by us to make these things work. Instead of fuelling fears that things might go wrong, as some seem to do, we want to hear well based reassurance from them that they are doing their jobs properly and have plans in place to make things work. I have still not heard a scare story I believe, and do not think the EU will be able to mount some kind of self harming blockade of their trade with us after we leave. I find myself in the

position of having more confidence in our Ministers' abilities to make it work than they sometimes express in themselves. I have this confidence because most of what happens to ensure imports and exports work is nothing whatsoever to do with governments. It rests on a willing buyer and a willing seller, who will still be there in abundance the day we leave the EU. The day after we have left the same rules and regulations apply in the UK as the day before we leave. There can be a gentle transition on that day as a result.

It is apparently a shock to some in government that the UK can once again run her own affairs. That is what we pay the government salaries to do, so let's hear how they are doing it .I repeated my request yesterday to the Prime Minister that we should publish our tariff schedule now, and should remove all tariffs form imported components to be used by UK based manufacturers. That would be a good boost to UK manufacturing.