

Exiting the EU – some factual background to where we now are

If nothing else is approved by Parliament we will leave the EU on 29 March 2019 with no Withdrawal Agreement or Future Partnership Agreement. If the government does wish to sign such Agreements it will need primary legislation to endorse them and to provide the large sums of money to pay for them . Those of you who want Brexit and are very critical of what has happened should study this carefully, as it shows a lot has been achieved to complete all the legal processes for exit next March. The present rows are about whether effective exit should be delayed and whether we should re-enter parts of the EU that otherwise we will simply leave next year. All the spin based on Project Fear Mark 2 gets in the way of a clear understanding of how we leave the EU, and what Parliament has so far decided.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Referendum 23 June 2016 17.4 million vote to leave the EU, 16.1m vote to remain in EU

Told by government in a letter to all households that voters would decide and Parliament would carry out the decision.

16 March 2017 Royal assent to EU(Notification of Withdrawal) Act

Gained 3rd reading in Commons by 494 votes to 122

Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed

This fulfils all international and EU law requirements to leave on 29 March 2019, with or without additional Agreements.

6 June 2017 UK General election. 83.3% vote for parties promising to implement Brexit

7.4% vote Lib Dem and 3% vote SNP pledging second referendum on terms of exit

EU Withdrawal Act royal assent 26 June 2018

Passed 3rd reading in Commons 324-295

Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed

This means that from the date specified in the Act, 29 March 2019, the UK ceases to be a member of the EU and the jurisdiction of the EU and its Court ceases in the UK. All current EU law at that date becomes good UK law, subject to any future amendment or repeal the UK may wish to undertake.

Taxation (Cross border trade) Bill passes Commons July 2018

Amended to prevent UK levying customs for EU or other foreign country unless they levy customs for us on a reciprocal basis. Amended to require primary legislation before re entering EU customs union. Amended to prevent UK staying in EU VAT system. This is now in its Lords stages, but as it is a Tax/money Bill they cannot block the will of the Commons.

Currently in negotiation are

Draft Withdrawal Agreement containing a 21 month Transitional period, additional UK financial contributions after March 2019, reassurances to citizens living in each other's territory

A possible political Agreement about good intentions to negotiate an Association Agreement between UK and EU governing a future partnership. This could include a free trade agreement, a defence and security partnership, data sharing, criminal justice co-operation and much else. The UK insists on linkage between the two possible Agreements. Both sides say nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Both sides need Parliamentary approval.

The so called Chequers compromise is the current UK offer to the EU over the future partnership. The EU has stated it cannot agree the idea of partial membership of the single market, nor the proposals on common customs and tariffs between UK and EU.

The EU has in the past implied that a Canada style free trade deal with fewer tariffs and more service provision than the EU Canada Agreement is on offer, but only for Great Britain. There remains a substantial disagreement between various parties on the issue of the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland border. The UK refuses to split the treatment of Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, which is important to the DUP members of the Coalition in particular.

[The Lib Dems stake out the undemocratic extreme](#)

"Demand better" says the boomerang Lib Dem slogan. That's good advice when the Lib Dems come round with their proposal to block the wishes of the people and try to overturn the results of the 2016 referendum. Standing on a clear ticket for delay, watering down of Brexit and even a second referendum on terms, they slumped to just 7.4% of the vote in the 2017 election. They had not found the moderate middle, the friendly centre of gravity of the UK electorate as they claim. Their views were far from democratic, as they railed against the decision of the UK voters in 2016. Nor were they very liberal, as they dreamt up another Manifesto of regulations, higher taxes and exhortations to all of us to change the way we live our lives.

It's a crowded space, this search for the so called moderate centre ground. It is defined as going back to Brussels, saying we are sorry for ever thinking of leaving, and accepting the full swathe of laws, taxes, budgets and common policies that characterise the modern EU. What ever is either moderate or democratic about such an agenda? How is it democratic for more and more laws to be made behind closed doors, drafted by officials we cannot sack or make accountable, and approved by Ministers from 27 countries under pressure not to rock the boat? What is liberal about the austerity policies

of the EU's budget controls, requiring higher taxes, lower spending and lower deficits from countries mired in unemployment in the south and west of the EU? How is the EU's policy of helping pay for Turkey's heavily defended borders with the Middle East moderate? What is green about the fishing discard policy or the dash for diesel and the reliance on coal for power by Germany? Why does everything proposed by the EU get through without a whisper of criticism? When will they apologise for the huge damage the Exchange Rate Mechanism did to the livelihoods and businesses of many in the UK, or for the revenge the Euro crisis visited on Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Spain?

The outgoing Leader of the Lib Dems cannot make up his mind exactly when he will leave his job. Maybe he should hold a party referendum on the topic. Nor does he have any confidence in his fellow MPs, saying that they need to open up the contest for a new Leader to people not in Parliament. I guess as he believes laws should be made in Brussels and more control pass to the EU there is a kind of logic to not bothering whether a party leader can argue, question and vote on what we do here at home in our own legislature. It is a further sign of his insouciance towards UK democracy. Into this private debate with a few voters has intruded Tony Blair. A man who did well out of leading the Labour party, he has gone as far as he dare to say his own party under new leadership cannot win an election, and maybe Labour members like him should look around for a new party. Perhaps he has in mind a Social Democrat pro EU break away from Labour, rather like in the 1980s. They would doubtless need to join up with the Lib Dems.

Others looking at this crowded postage stamp of a political position include the hard line group of pro EU Labour MPs who call themselves moderates and who spend most of their time disagreeing with the electors when they are not disagreeing with their own Leader over most things. All of them suffer from the same underlying problem. There has never been a large market for a pro EU party in the UK. When John Stevens set up the pro Euro Conservatives it gained just 1.4% of the vote in the European elections. It peaked at under 4% in the Kensington and Chelsea by election to Parliament and was disbanded owing to a lack of voter support shortly afterwards. I doubt there would be much of a market on the left for a pro EU Labour party that made its peace with the Establishment on a number of issues where Corbyn is more radical. The pro EU Social Democrats never won new seats in a General Election. The Lib Dem result last time should be a warning to them all that trying to stop Brexit gets you to a very poor third place.

What they seek is no moderate centre they can capture. Supporting a new sell out to the EU is far from being a moderate position to adopt.

[Spending priorities](#)

The government is conducting a spending review, to come up with 3 year

spending plans from 2019-2020 until 2021-2. They have already announced substantial increases for the NHS budget and are currently consulting on what other changes should be made.

It is important that priority areas like the NHS, schools and social care receive increases to meet demand and costs. It is also important that action is taken to offset some of these increases through spending changes elsewhere, to avoid tax rate rises and to keep borrowing to low levels.

Leaving the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement would be a good start to the spending review, giving the government the best part of £39bn over two years to allocate to other priorities. Cancelling HS2 would also free considerable sums of capital, allowing spending on increasing rail capacity substantially to the Midlands and the North by investing in smart signalling and leaving money over for other purposes. If the government does not wish to revisit HS2, it could at least examine how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Network Rail spending and borrowing which remain at high levels.

The government should also review its spending on Overseas Aid. More of the budget should be allocated to the first year costs of migrants coming to the UK, as the rules allow. More should be used to construct the ships we need to provide humanitarian aid and support in disaster torn areas. This would relieve those budgets. This Parliament would not want to repeal the 0.7% Aid target so it is important to look at how it is spent.

Where budgets are being increased the government needs to ensure that the extra money is being routed into improving the volume and quality of service being provided. The departments need to bid for the extra money with costed plans for improvement. In the case of social care the money needs to go into more provision for social care support for individuals in their own homes, and into providing more good quality care home places. In the NHS there needs to be an expansion of capacity for the GP service and for the hospital service, to cut waiting times and to make the NHS more accessible to users.

What would your priorities be, both for more spending, and for reductions?

Illegal occupation of land

There have been a number of cases recently of people seeking to occupy land against the wishes of the landowner, where there are no suitable facilities for overnight and longer stays.

Parliament has legislated to give powers to landowners and the police to ban illegal occupations, but some Councils are concerned that these powers are not strong enough. I have taken this matter up with Government Ministers and will let readers see their reply.

The powers are under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 61. I have requested the authorities to use the powers available which they have done successfully in some cases. The police can take action in specified circumstances against trespassers. At issue is what should the police have to establish before moving against illegal occupation?

[Where is the UK's tariff schedule for March 30 2019?](#)

I am writing to Liam Fox at the Department for International Trade to ask to see the UK's proposed tariff schedules for trading with the world after March 29 2019, assuming we leave without an agreement with the EU. I will say:

I welcome the government's determination to complete preparations for leaving the EU without an agreement and to share the details with the public and Parliament in good time. I am sure you and your department will be pleased to set out the terms on which the UK will trade with the world once we have left, and to get on with negotiating new free trade agreements with the many countries in the world which would like one with us, as well as with the EU assuming they too wish to share the ideas of their Canada free trade agreement more widely.

One of the most important statements that the UK is open for business and ready for life outside the EU will be the publication of our schedule of tariffs or trading terms for when we have left. It would be good to know the proposals as soon as possible, as business could start to exploit the advantages of a better schedule as soon as it knows what the UK's intentions are. I assume you do not intend to simply copy the full EU tariff schedule we currently have to use for non EU trade, but would wish to set out a tariff schedule tailor made for the UK's needs.

Once we are out the EU then of course if we continue to impose tariffs on the rest of the world we will have to impose the same tariffs on the EU. I would like to know your thinking on how we might modify their schedule, especially in the following ways.

Would we remove all low tariffs on the grounds that costs of collection hardly make them worthwhile? This could simplify business life for many. Would we remove high agricultural tariffs from food we cannot produce for ourselves, to give consumers a better deal? Why, for example, would we want to keep tariffs on citrus fruit after we have left? Would we adjust agricultural tariffs on products we can produce here to a lower average level than the current high level imposed on non EU product, when EU product has to face the same tariff level? Is there an optimum tariff level on products like beef and pork which would still offer good protection for UK farmers, but would cut the cost of non EU imports? Much of the

competitive threat to UK farmers currently comes from no tariff product from the continent.

Would we remove all tariffs from components needed in the supply chain for the manufacture of complex goods in the UK?

Setting our own schedule gives us great scope to get rid of tariffs which hurt the UK consumer which are designed to help continental business more than us, and gives us scope to concentrate remaining tariffs in areas of UK farming and industry that need some protection as they adjust to the new global approach the UK will be taking.

I look forward to seeing the publication of your proposals. These could be good for UK trade and our economy. They are likely to result in import substitution in areas like farming.