

Borders open for trade

The EU is labouring under various misapprehensions about the UK. It seems to think if it hangs tough the UK will make more generous offers. It feels it has no need to engage on trade as if their access to our market will stay the same whatever the outcome of the talks. They need to realise if we leave without a deal we will put in the current EU tariff schedule with the EU outside our border paying the tariffs to comply with WTO rules. They apparently think if they block an open border proposal made by the UK for Northern Ireland the UK will give in and agree that all or part of the UK has to stay in the customs union.

It is in everyone's interest involved with the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to uphold the various Agreements and to retain an open border. The UK has set out clearly how that can be achieved. Outside the customs union the UK would have an electronic border for the goods of recognised traders, allowing their trucks through without stopping through number plate recognition against filed documentation in advance. Small Irish and Northern Irish traders regularly crossing the border would be exempted from tariffs and other new barriers. We will install this unilaterally if there is no deal. The EU will have to decide if it wants to put up its own more restrictive border on the Republic side. The Republic of Ireland needs to sort out with its EU colleagues just how they will operate their side of the border.

The papers published on Monday on Customs and Trade make clear the UK has a solution for our borders with No Deal or with a Trade Agreement with the EU. We will adapt the current registered Economic Operators approach, so most of our trade will be notified in advance of the truck or container reaching our port. Goods from approved traders will go straight through without extra customs checks compared to today, with any duty settled electronically as part of the account. Ro Ro ports which mainly handle EU trade will be brought within this same system as EU trade becomes foreign trade if we have no deal.

The UK government is well advanced with changing EU trade agreements with other countries into UK trade agreements with those countries, as it is entitled to on splitting from the EU. There is no cliff edge. A Transition period may only be needed if the EU and the UK come to a late agreement next year which requires computer and physical changes to our border arrangements that need time to implement. Getting on with implementing a customs and border check system for No Deal covers most of the issues anyway.

There is growing resistance amongst Brexit voters and many businesses to the idea of a long further period of delay. Uncertainty is reduced by preparing for No Deal in ways which allow a deal. If the EU as I fear says the UK has not done enough to warrant trade talks anytime soon the government needs to redouble its work to make a success of No Deal. Maybe then the EU will see they have overplayed their intrinsically weak hand.