

Chequers explained: the EU is just offering a costly Withdrawal Agreement for now.

There is no chance of the government securing a legally binding agreement that implements all the proposals in the Chequers paper. The EU has made that clear, and the government itself has said it will need to make more compromises. This implies it will give the EU more wins over and above those included in the Chequers draft.

We need to remember what the EU has in mind and what Chequers glosses over in the negotiations to date. The EU wants the UK to sign a Withdrawal Agreement before we leave. This would bind us in to the EU for a further 21 months, require us to pay an estimated £39bn, much of it over the next two years, and would prevent us from exploiting any of the benefits of Brexit in terms of UK legislative change from EU laws, and deny us new trade deals with non EU countries. I have never seen the rationale for such an Agreement from the UK point of view. Delay is particularly frustrating. What could we agree in 21 months that we have been unable to agree in the 33 months from the vote until official exit day? Why is more business uncertainty after March 2019 a good thing, when Remain tell us it is bad thing prior to departure?

The UK government has in mind a Future Comprehensive Partnership. The EU sees this as meaning the UK will have to sign an EU Association Agreement, normally reserved for countries wanting to join the EU to bring them more formally into line with EU legal requirements. No-one thinks there will be a full Association Agreement ready to sign before March 2019 so it would be a promissory note of a possible Agreement. Why would any government wish to sign away so much money in a Withdrawal Agreement when the prize it says it wants will not be properly defined or legally binding at the same time?

Many people including me think an Association Agreement would be a bad idea. It would bind us into the rules of the single market – just for goods under the Chequers model but for the whole thing according to Mr Barnier. The EU would then want budget contributions, powers for the European Court and the rest of their mantra that you have to observe all the rules and pay the bills if you want to remain in the single market.

Understanding this Vote Leave campaigned to leave the single market and customs union as part of leaving the EU. Dressing up belonging as some new Partnership will not wash with Leave voters, and will not wash in its Chequers form with the EU. The one thing many people can unite behind is in ruling out signing the Withdrawal Agreement, as that on its own is very clearly a bad deal.