

How complicated is Brexit?

I have often said that "Brexit could be easy", and have gone on to explain how the army of consultants, Remain liking government officials on both sides of the Channel, and the EU Commission will doubtless slow it down and make it more complex. My critics change "could" to "will be" when commenting and claim I do not understand how complex people will make it.

Let's have another go at explaining the dispute. At the high level Brexit is easy. The country leaving sends an Article 50 letter. Two years later it leaves, with or without a deal concerning the future relationship. It could of course leave sooner than two years were both sides to want to make it easy. All the EU has to do is to confirm it wants tariff free access to our market with no new barriers and we can get on with registering that as an FTA at the WTO. Otherwise the UK and the EU trade with each other as all non EU members trade with the EU today.

The EU however wants to get rid of the UK as a force to slow down monetary and political union, but is very keen not to lose the UK's substantial financial contributions. Its negotiating strategy is to delay at every available opportunity, as each month of delay is another £1bn. Each month's delay is also another opportunity to watch the UK indulging in an absurd negotiation with itself, leading some in the EU to conclude the UK is likely to prove weak. Some in the EU think if they play it long the pro EU forces that remain in the UK may succeed in demanding further large payments to the EU. Some hope for a new subservient relationship for the UK which will remain in some close association of a legal kind that stops it gaining full control of its laws, borders and budgets without offering the UK any influence over the EU approach to these matters.

The government's official position clearly rejects any such approach. The government has rejected continued membership of the single market and Customs Union, on the basis that both the Leave and Remain campaigns said these would not be available without budget contributions, freedom of movement and the rest which we rejected in the referendum. The government has discussed possible interim periods or implementation periods if things are agreed for our future relationship that take a bit longer to fix. They are not currently asking for any such thing in the talks, as you would need an Agreement first before deciding how you implemented it!

It is one of the stupid myths that asking for a comprehensive Transitional period would solve anything. One or two more years of full membership duties to spend more time arguing over the future relationship should suit neither party, and would increase the period of uncertainty for business. You only need to ask for interim periods or delays if there is a good Agreement accepted by both sides with difficult technical issues that cannot be fixed quickly.

The scares of no planes flying, lorries sitting in jams at Dover and trade disrupted are irresponsible. It is in neither sides interest on the day we

leave to run their affairs so badly that they disrupt EU and UK citizens going about their business. Governments, EU and domestic, are our servants. The UK is getting on with putting in a customs and borders system that will work from 30 March 2019. Doubtless the EU will do the same, as they have to answer to the farmers, factories and businesses of the continent who will expect continuity and smooth running. Both sides have to conform with WTO rules, abide by international law and allow independent courts to uphold private contracts that will continue to operate.