

How Theresa May could have a good party conference.

It is that time of year when advisers to the Prime Minister have to consider the first draft of the big speech she has to give to party conference in Birmingham in the first week of October.

The Chequers proposals have gone down very badly with the party in the country. The negotiations with the EU have not produced a breakthrough for Britain in the way the government wanted. The Prime Minister should say something along the following lines:

“I have worked hard with my team to try to negotiate a good exit deal for the UK. I have always been friendly and positive towards the EU. I have stressed we would prefer to have a comprehensive future partnership. I have offered to maintain the substantial contribution we provide to European security through our pledge of armed forces, our intelligence work and our general collaboration. I would be happy to keep tariff free trade between us, even though we import much more than we export. I have offered to pay money we do not owe to show goodwill over the EU’s process of adjustment to the ending of our large financial contributions. I have offered to maintain the rules and standards of the single market for goods even after we have left.

Many of you think I have offered too much. Some of you are concerned that we would not in practice be taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders as promised. I think we would, but I understand your worries.

I am therefore today withdrawing the very generous Chequers offer, which the EU has told us does not go far enough. The EU has also been critical of important parts of the compromise it embedded. So I say to the EU, in the time remaining time to do a deal, I propose we negotiate a comprehensive free trade treaty instead.

Some say this cannot be done in just a few months. I disagree. If there is a will there is a way. Both the UK and the EU have accepted the Canada Free Trade deal the EU has recently signed. We can take that text as our starting point, and see what more we can add to it, given that the UK and the EU start on trade and commerce regulation from the same position.

In the meantime I have recently chaired a Cabinet to stress to all Ministers and senior officials in all Brexit facing departments that I want us to be ready to leave without a Withdrawal Agreement in March 2019. I stressed that the government will provide whatever resource is needed to be ready. The problems have been greatly exaggerated. I know of no reason why the planes will not fly or the medicines cease to arrive the day after we have left. Where lower level agreements or understandings are needed between the EU authorities and the UK government we are ready to put them in place. These will be mutually beneficial, and more profitable to the rest of the EY given the large imbalance of trade between us.