

Let's try negotiating with the EU rather than ourselves!

At last today the UK will start negotiating with the rest of the EU. Some in politics and the media have been making our country look stupid by persisting in having a negotiation amongst ourselves over how weak a negotiating stance we should adopt in Brussels. Some do this because they do want to wreck our negotiation proper. Others do so because they do not understand how a serious negotiation is best handled, and doubt the underlying strength and fairness of the UK position.

We have heard siren voices tell us we need to pay large and maybe continuing sums of money into the EU. Of course not. There is no legal requirement to do so. The rest of the world trades happily with the EU without paying budget contributions or one off payments.

Some say we have to stay in the single market and or Customs Union. Of course not. Most countries that trade with the EU are in neither. We do need to leave both bodies, as the Manifesto of both Labour and Conservative made clear in the recent election, in order to negotiate better trade deals with the rest of the world. The rest of the EU stated categorically we cannot stay in the single market without accepting the laws, freedom of movement and budget contributions that go with it. In other words to be in the single market we would need to be in the EU.

Some say the UK cannot expect to get a free trade deal with the rest of the EU when we walk out. Why not? We have a comprehensive free trade deal with them at the moment, and the UK is happy to offer continued easy access to our market. The rest of the EU sells us so much more than we sell them. Why would they want to lose some of that?

Some say you cannot negotiate a free trade deal in 20 months. That is probably true, but we don't need to negotiate one. We merely need to renew one that exists already.

Of course it is possible the rest of the EU will want to harm their trade with us. In that case the negotiations will take the form of the EU proposing barriers to their trade with us and ours with them, whilst we urge them not to. We will also of course be pointing out they cannot do so against WTO rules, which will greatly limit their scope to do damage. It will mainly come down to them imposing large tariffs on agriculture where WTO does allow such practises, and us retaliating. The UK can once out also remove tariffs on agricultural products from the rest of the world that we cannot produce for ourselves.

Tomorrow I will talk about a new range of stories the media could pursue on this topic, to get us away from the boring and repetitious "Lets water down and undermine the UK position" pieces that they all have been running for a year.