

No deal is better than a bad deal

Those simple eight words mean the UK has a good negotiating position when it comes to sorting out our future relationship with the EU. Without them the UK would be in a very weak position.

There are those in the EU who talk darkly of a punishment deal, seeking to make the UK pay for daring to leave. There are those who want to send us a large bill with no legal backing to it and expect the UK to pay. There are those who think it a clever idea to volunteer continental farm products up for high WTO tariffs in order to make a political point. That is why the UK has to make it clear we will not accept any such deal.

None of this means the UK negotiators should walk out in a huff at the first available opportunity if the EU's demands are silly. There is still a good prospect of reaching sensible conclusions. The UK intends to take back control of our borders, money and laws. It is happy to have extensive agreements on free trade, security sharing, academic collaborations, transport rights and the rest. We are leaving the EU's legal structures, single currency and budget, not leaving Europe. It will require a combination of friendly patience, stressing the advantages of many collaborations, and unbending clarity that we are taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders.

It is clear that many on the continent do wish to keep tariff free access to our lucrative market. It is obvious they like sharing security and Intelligence with us. The only way to get a good outcome for both sides is for the UK government to repeat that it makes no sense for us to take a bad deal. Nor would that in practice help them. It's a pity the other main parties contesting the General Election do not recognise this simple truth. If they understood negotiating they would also say with Mrs May , "No deal is better than a bad deal."

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