Solving the Irish border

The EU has long decided to use the Irish border issue as one to try to force the UK to stay in the Customs Union, keep all EU rules and make the exit payment they want which is not a legal requirement on the UK. It is most important that the UK civil service negotiators understand this is a silly ruse, and robustly put the alternatve case. Let me remind them what it is.

The border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, part of the UK, is already a complex one. It is a currency, VAT, Excise and criminal law jurisdiction border. This means there are already so called hard border arrangements to ensure any goods moving across the border pay the right amount of VAT to the right authorities, and pay the relevant Excise duties. There are anti smuggling systems in place as there is obviously current scope to exploit differences of VAT and Excise by criminals. There are ways of handling movement of criminals across the frontier, and electronic systems for trade through TIR, registered economic operators and the rest.

If we also need to levy customs duties when we leave because the EU refuses the UK offer of tariff free trade, so be it. The same methods used for Vat and Excise can be used for the customs levies. It can be done electronically away from the border as it is today.

Before we entered the EU we had a free travel area with the Republic and all involved in the neotiations wish this to continue, so it is difficult to see new problems concerning movement of people. When the Uk legislates its new borders system for movement of people it is likely to seek to reduce migrant numbers into the UK by changing benefit rules and requiring work permits, not by imposing new controls at the frontier. We already have external border checks on illegals and on criminals seeking to cross. We will continue to welcome as many tourists, visitors and people who pay their own bills who wish to come.

I trust the UK will give a robust defence of this approach and demonstrate that the Irish border is a put up job by the EU to push us back into conformity.