

Mrs May and the EU speak with forked tongue about Russia

A few months ago Mrs May was condemning Russia for the poisonings. The EU imposed sanctions when condemning Russian activity in Ukraine.

Yesterday Mrs May met Mr Putin and shook his hand. Doing so with a cross look does not get away from the fact that this was a significant change of stance from the broken relations of recent months. This was a recognition that the UK needs a relationship with Russia. Germany led the support for the restoration of Russian votes in the Council of Europe, showing they as leader of the EU wishes to have an improved relationship with Russia. Mrs May appears to be marching in step with Germany.

Crucial to the underlying position is the German and EU decision to press on with Nord Stream 2, a large gas pipeline to sell Russian gas to Germany and the rest of the EU by pipeline under the Baltic Sea. This major commitment will increase continental Europe's dependence on Russian gas. It undermines the position of the Ukraine, which could lose pipelines revenues for the gas currently routed from Russia to the West via that link. I find it difficult to understand why they wish to undermine the Ukraine in this way when they claim to be so concerned about its fate.

It is difficult to comprehend why we hear the angry words and see the sanctions imposed when Germany is so determined to improve its relations with Russia and keen to increase her dependence on Russian gas. Mrs May may brief that she had a frosty exchange when meeting Mr Putin, but the truth is she met him and shook him by the hand. The EU will carry on complaining about Ukraine, but they have no intention of taking any action to reclaim Crimea which might well vote to stay with Russia should they be given another vote supervised by independent observers. The Russian supervised vote was strongly pro Crimea being part of Russia.

The EU and Mrs May have also been complicit in strengthening Russia in the Middle East. I did not want us intervening militarily in Syria, but if the EU/UK aim is to block Russian power they should have taken more action in Syria at a time when Russia moved into the power vacuum created by NATO's limited involvement. We allowed Russia and Assad to do most of the fighting to remove ISIS, leaving them in charge of most of the country.

Clearly the EU has decided to improve its relations with Russia and to increase its commercial dependence. The rest is just spin.

Interview by Emmbrook pupils

Two Emmbrook pupils attended my surgery today and interviewed me on the topic of school funding for their media studies work.

They were most professional camera crew and interviewers, who wanted to know what I had done and what more I would do to secure more cash for their school.

I explained the campaign I have been pursuing with other MPs to get more money for local schools, and pointed out Wokingham schools received an uplift of £5.1m extra this year. I look forward to more from the next budget, given the promises currently being made in the Conservative leadership election. I have argued to both candidates that we need a more generous schools settlement,.

The chilling silence about our money



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One of the oddest things about this out of touch Parliament is the refusal of most MPs to talk about how we should spend the windfall from leaving the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement. Worse still the Opposition parties rush to tell us we must go on paying large sums to the EU come what may, and even some in the government seem to be dreaming up ways to go on funding the EU after we have left. Given how central to the Leave case saving the money was, this is denying us our democratic decision. There is no legal basis to justify payments to the EU after we have left. The origins of the large £39bn Treasury forecast, itself an underestimate, comes from Mrs May's wish to delay our exit for 21-45 months which of course would lead to big additional payments, and her wish to dilute Brexit so we could remain entangled with new financial commitments thereafter.

Margaret Thatcher recognised that the UK had a bad deal on financial contributions, and got a substantial improvement to our deal as PM. Mr Blair gave away some of that improvement on the promise of a thorough reform of the Common Agricultural Policy which never happened. Many UK taxpayers and fed up

with having to pay more tax to send to rich countries on the continent. These contributions give us no benefit at home, and add to the deficit on the balance of payments.

At a time when the world economy is slowing, and when Mr Draghi of the European Central Bank recommends some government reflation from tax cuts or spending rises, the UK needs a growth budget. Using the substantial money we save from October 31 if we just leave could give us the boost we need. We can spend all of the net contribution we save, whilst paying the same level of farm grants and other sums that the EU sends us from the high gross contributions we make to the EU.

The deliberate misinformation about EU grants throughout the referendum campaign sought to persuade voters that we would lose these payments when we left. They should have pointed out that as we sent them the money in the first place to pay these grants, we can simply pay them direct. More importantly, we save all the money we send and do not get back as well. We can boost the UK economy by 1% of GDP out of the savings and the tax overshoot this government has gone in for.

How likely is No Deal?

No Deal is a misnomer, like much of the rest of the Brexit debate. No deal means leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, but with a number of other agreements in place governing trade facilitation, aviation, haulage and government procurement. It would also mean using the extensive rules and regulations of the WTO to govern our trade with the rest of the EU just as our trade with the rest of the world is governed today. The Withdrawal Agreement was not of course allowing exit any time soon, as it was a decision to delay exit for 21 to 45 months, with uncertainty about how to get out thereafter.

The Withdrawal Agreement has been three times rejected by Parliament, and overwhelmingly defeated in the European elections with only 9% supporting the party that proposed it. It is possible a new Prime Minister will be able to negotiate enhanced arrangements before October 31 that add to the various agreements available for exit then without the Withdrawal Treaty. The new Prime Minister should offer a comprehensive free trade agreement, with a text based on EU/Canada and EU/Japan. We could then proceed to leave without imposing tariffs if the EU agrees to negotiate such an agreement.

Some say Parliament can block leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement. That would be very difficult for Parliament to do. If the new Prime Minister wishes just to leave he need not ask for a further delay to our exit after 31 October, so we will just leave. How would Parliament be able to make a Prime Minister seek a delay when he does not wish to do so? Parliament anyway cannot legislate to require a delay, because a delay not

only needs a Prime Ministerial request of the EU but also a positive response by the EU. Mrs May decided she wanted a delay and asked for it regardless of the view of Parliament last time this arose. European law is superior to UK law all the time we stay in, and under EU law we are out on 31 October unless something else happens.

In this issue the PM is central. If the PM is determined to leave without the Withdrawal Agreement and keen to keep to the specified date, it would be very difficult for Parliament to find a way to stop him.

[The EU Viet Nam free trade agreement](#)

All those who write to me to complain that the UK might sign a Free Trade Agreement with the USA not to their liking might like to concentrate on the Free Trade Agreements we have to accept, entered into by the EU for us. This week the EU has signed a new agreement with Viet Nam. There has been no debate in Parliament about it, and the UK has no right to reject it or to require improvements and amendments.

It is a long and complex document. The tariff reductions are asymmetric, with 7 years to get EU tariffs to zero, and more than 10 years to get all Viet Nam tariffs to zero. Both sides pledge themselves to the doctrine of equivalence over sanitary and phytosanitary matters. The provisions on animal welfare are unclear.

EU trade with Viet Nam is not large. The EU imports some clothing, telecoms products, computers and shoes. I think these agreements ought to be subject to proper Parliamentary control, with UK negotiators taking the views of public and Parliament into the negotiations.