

Carbon dioxide output in UK continues to fall

Some constituents have written to me asking about CO2 levels in the UK. The latest figures show that the UK since 1990 has cut carbon emissions more rapidly than any other major economy. They are now estimated to be 39% below 1990 levels. The biggest falls have come in power generation, through the ending of coal burning stations.

Reductions in homes has been slower so homes now account for about as much CO2 output as power stations. All those keen to see more progress can help by improving home insulation, improving boiler efficiency , being careful with power use or switching to non carbon generating methods of home heating. I am pressing for the government to remove VAT on green products to make this more affordable.

Euro area growth falls away

Today it was confirmed that Eurozone growth only managed 0.2% in the fourth quarter, and was just 0.1% in the third. Annualising that gives you a low 0.6% growth a year, compared to the UK's annualised 1.6% over the same half year.

Yesterday the OECD cut its projections for growth in most countries of the world. It cut its forecast for Germany to just 0.7% for 2019, and Italy to -0.2%. It put the UK at 0.8%. The heading for its release was "Growth is weakening, particularly in Europe".

Now would be a good time for the UK to cut tax rates and increase spending on schools and social care, as we could do with a boost and have the scope to do so as we leave the EU.

If you do not like the Withdrawal Agreement you won't like the Political

declaration either

Two Treaties instead of one. That is Mrs May's idea of leaving the EU! I have set out before the dangers of the Withdrawal Agreement, which would stop us taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders for at least another 21 months and quite possibly longer. The accompanying Political Declaration is the herald of an even worse Treaty to lock us into many features of the EU for all time, with no exit clause.

Some parts of the Political Declaration are vague or contradictory. Does it mean a free trade deal with us free to follow our own trade policy, or does it mean effective membership of their customs union with limited scope to do better deals elsewhere? Does it mean respecting our own UK law codes, or does it in practice mean accepting EU laws and rules over many parts of our lives in order to meet their strong words that we must not compete unfairly and must observe a level playing field with them? Doesn't a level playing field to them mean keeping taxes up, having the same regulations, and submitting ourselves to their laws?

Some of the text is detailed and finished. We must assume this would pass straight into any draft Treaty. Above all the EU has insisted on the same architecture for enforcing the Partnership Treaty as for the Withdrawal Agreement. They require a joint committee, where any matter raising EU law will be determined by the European Court of Justice!

That's no Brexit. That is continued subservience to the EU and its powerful court. I did not vote leave to end up in 2 EU Treaties that recreate many of the features of our membership. The EU sees the Partnership treaty as a kind of EU Association Treaty. These are the devices they sign with countries like Turkey to gradually to bring them in line with the EU as a prelude to possible membership. That is not what Leave means.

Knife crime

I went to the Urgent Question on knife crime on Monday. MPs all round the Commons are concerned at the escalation in these crimes of violence in various communities in the UK and keen to see more done to reduce and control it. I asked the Home Secretary what action he is taking to spread best practice from those towns and cities that are making progress with prevention to those with the worst problems, and what can be done to ensure extra money and personnel going into policing and responding are being targeted in the right way to tackle this trouble.

During the exchanges there was a general feeling that the Glasgow approach has had some success. Some favour wider use of stop and search powers to

remove knives from young people, including random searches without grounds for suspicion. Some think more police in general is what is needed, whilst the Prime Minister has suggested that there is no correlation between police numbers and knife crime.

Clearly having an active police presence in areas of our towns prone to knife crime attacks at times of the day and night when they are most likely must be an important part of the response. We also need to see that this is not a problem which the police on their own can solve. All the young teenagers caught up in this violence have parents or guardians, teachers, adult wider family members, youth and sports club organisers and others who know them and take an interest in them. Any one of these adults could say or do the right thing to reduce the chances of that young person carrying a knife or being drawn into gangland activity.

Some young people are drawn into gangs out of a sense of adventure. Some are groomed by older gang members. Some end up in a gang out of fear. Whilst young people do not want to be subject to home detention, adults in the family do need to take an interest in how much time their children spend out on the streets and what risks that might bring to them. Young people that have been looked after by the authorities or are the products of a broken home are particularly vulnerable to gang grooming according to the Children's Commissioner. The gang culture can lead to drugs and other criminal activity. Once lines have been crossed the young person can be forced into continuing with a way of life they would not have chosen had they known how it ended, or if they had enough support at the beginning to say No.

[No more regular tests for PIP payments to pensioners](#)

The government has announced that in future 270,000 disabled pensioners who receive Personal Independence Payments from the state will no longer face a regular test to check their continuing eligibility. PIPs are amounts up to £145 a week as a supplement to pension and other income made available to people with disabilities and long term health problems following medical examination, and other checks. Some recipients have found it worrying that they have needed follow up tests once they have qualified for the benefit, so this announcement helps them.