

A business friendly Brexit

I have good news for you all. Despite all the noise and disagreement, most people and political parties want the same things from Brexit. No-one wants it to damage business or lose us jobs. Most in the debate think more free trade rather than less free trade is a good idea. The Labour Manifesto spent time setting out the kind of free trade deals they would like a UK outside the single market and customs union to be able to negotiate.

Business has some legitimate questions of government that need answering. Where we currently receive grants and subsidies from the EU budget, business needs to know what the UK government will do back in control of the contribution money which currently funds those payments. This is particularly important to farming businesses where government payments and subsidies are an important part of farm incomes. IT is also important to those parts of the UK that qualify for extra grants for economic development. I look forward to more detail from the Treasury.

Business would like to know how and when the UK can expand its free trade agreements with non EU countries. The Department for International Trade is working away with options for early trade deals with a number of countries. The sooner we can make progress with these the better, bearing in mind we cannot sign the deals until we leave.

Business also of course wants to know what will be the basis of future trade with the rest of the EU. The UK is offering a continuation of current free trade with no new barriers. It is also saying it will translate into UK law all the present rules and regulations to allow continuity. The UK Parliament will in future be able to improve or repeal individual measures, but would not of course seek to block business being EU compliant for all their exports to the continent, which they are currently. Parliament will take into account the EU business needs when legislating in future, but may wish to allow different arrangements for non EU and domestic business.

The sooner we discuss the future relationship with the EU the sooner we will be able to clarify these matters. Whilst there will be more tough talk and posturing from some EU officials, many in the other member states will want easy access to the UK market and will see that has to be reciprocal.

Some say there is not time to negotiate a free trade agreement with the EU. That would be true if we had lots of barriers to remove and discuss. Instead we already have free trade with the EU, so it is simple to confirm it if there is the will on both sides to do so. If the EU really does want to impose barreirs on their trade with us they will need to set out what these are, and we can then consider what barriers we would need to place in return. All of course would have to be complaint with WTO rules, which limits the ability of the EU to do damage. The main sector which could end up with high tariffs is agriculture, where they sell us twice as much as we sell them. We also have the option on that scenario of sourcing much more food cheaper from outside the EU, where we could lower tariffs where it suited us, or produce

more at home where we can.

I note that after a media barrage about staying in the Customs Union the government has not changed the policy set out in the White Paper and approved overwhelmingly by the Commons to send the letter. I also note the Chancellor still supports government policy despite press briefings to the contrary. We will leave the single market and the Customs Union when we leave the EU, as the rest of the EU also intends and as the Conservative and Labour Manifestos made clear.

There is no soft or hard Brexit

I do not know how many more times I have to argue the obvious. There is Brexit, or there is staying in the EU. The EU has made it crystal clear you cannot stay in the single market without accepting freedom of movement and paying contributions, two things the people clearly rejected in the referendum and again in the General election. You cannot stay in the Customs Union if you want to have free trade deals with the rest of the world.

The Labour Manifesto in 2017 stated they accepted the decision of the referendum. They set out policies to negotiate a range of new free trade and investment agreements with non EU countries that assume we are leaving the single market and the Customs Union. The Manifesto talked positively about a new trading relationship they wished to negotiate, again assuming the current one stemming from single market and customs union membership had gone. Their document stated that "freedom of movement will end when we leave the EU". The Conservative and DUP Manifestos also made clear we will be leaving the single market and Customs Union and looked forward to new free trade deals around the world.

So we have overwhelming agreement, endorsed by 86% of the voters in the election, that the UK will run her own immigration policy and her own trade policy on leaving. People in the UK have to grasp that arguing amongst ourselves about what our negotiating position should be, when the government has already set one out, can only help those in the EU institutions who wish to harm the UK. Fortunately most of the member states want access to our market and want good relations with us for a wide variety of reasons. Fortunately also the Lisbon Treaty has in Clause 8 a clear legal requirement that the EU itself seeks an "area of prosperity and good neighbourliness" with us. We know how keen Commissioners are to stick to the law of the Treaty.

I am optimistic about the negotiations. It would help our country if more people got behind the government's stance. After all what the government wants is what all say they want – good access to the single market, and many collaborations and joint workings based on bilateral agreement. To change stance now would undermine us. We negotiate with the rest of the EU, not

amongst ourselves!

Sworn in as MP for Wokingham

Today I was sworn in as the newly elected MP for Wokingham. It was privilege. The solemn ceremony is designed to remind MPs of the seriousness of their job, and the role of Parliament is making government and authority accountable to the people.

I am most grateful to all those who voted for me. I wish to live up to their trust. I am also conscious that it is my duty to represent all the people of my constituency, however they voted. I will be taking up the issues which emerged strongly in the election, including money for schools and for social care.

The tragedy in Kensington

I have just heard of the tragic deaths and injuries in the flat fire. I send my condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my best wishes to all those injured for a speedy recovery. I thank all involved in saving people from the fire.

Creating a stable government

The current position in the Commons should allow a stable government to be formed. There are 650 MPs. If you take out the 7 Sinn Fein MPS who do not attend, and the Speaker and three Deputies who do not vote, there are 639 voting MPs. 320 is a majority. The Conservatives have 316 (and 2 Deputy Speakers). There are 10 DUP members, and one independent Unionist who are likely to vote with the Conservatives. That gives the government a majority.

In the last Parliament we regularly won votes by 40 to 50, well ahead of the nominal majority. It is difficult for the Opposition to get all its parties to the same view and then to get them all to turn up to vote. As the main Bill to be in the Queens Speech this time is likely to be the Repeal of the 1972 Act and continuity of EU regulations in UK law, there will be some

Labour Brexiteers who will vote with the government whatever contortions Labour is going through. Labour fought the election on a Manifesto pledging Brexit, and agreeing this meant leaving the single market. They are keen to see employment laws from the EU transferred into UK law. On these bases they need to vote for the government Bill.

If they do as they promised the Brexit bill will sail through. If they play politics and find ways to oppose, the government looks as if it has enough votes. There is no need for the government to propose lots of contentious legislation to make life more difficult.

The arrangement with the DUP will not be a formal coalition, and will not entail Conservatives changing their views on moral and religious matters. They will want to be more involved in UK politics and have a strong dislike of Mr Corbyn for his past views on Irish matters.