

Is that it? The Political declaration with the EU

As expected, the latest draft of the Political document about our possible future partnership with the EU is empty of any enforceable content of benefit to the UK. It is an invitation to trade and customs talks extending over an unspecified period, delaying our exit from the EU. Far from taking back control of our money, our laws, and our borders, this Agreement if signed alongside the Withdrawal Agreement which is legally binding means we stay in and have no unilateral right to leave if the talks prove fruitless.

Under this non binding proposal our fish are still in play for a future negotiation. The Irish backstop remains etched legally into the Withdrawal Agreement, with words about a future technological solution as a possibility. There is plenty about the need for future regulatory convergence and for the UK to keep adopting EU laws we have no say over. The proposed format of the Future Partnership would be an EU Association Agreement. These Agreements are designed to bring potential member states of the EU progressively into line and under legal obligation to the body they wish to join.

This disappointing document confirms that this negotiation does not deliver Brexit, and does not give us control of our laws, money and borders, any time soon, with the risk that it might never properly do so.

Central Bank errors can cause recessions

Last night I was privileged to give the inaugural annual Trustees lecture at the London Institute of Banking and Finance.

I used it to examine why we had large recessions in 1974-6, 1990-3 and 2007-10. In the UK we lost 4% of our output and income in 1974-6 (Labour), 1.1% in 1991-2 (Conservative) and 4.5% 2008-9 (Labour). In each case we lurched from rapid credit and money growth to a dramatic tightening of credit and money in an effort to curb past excesses. In each case two errors were made – the initial excessive credit build up, and the decision to stop it by rapid tightening.

In the 1974-6 period there was lethal inflation which reached 27%. Lots of jobs were lost but unemployment peaked at 5.5%. In 1990-2 inflation hit 10.9% but unemployment rose to a worrying 10.8%. In 2007-10 unemployment hit an unacceptable 8.1% whilst prices started to fall as the crisis intensified, such was the extent of the monetary tightening.

The 1990s crisis was entirely the result of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. As I had written before we adopted it as policy, it was a destabilising system. We started with the markets trying to force sterling up, which meant printing lots of money and keeping rates low to stop them. This resulted in a surge of credit. Then the pound wanted to go down, so the reverse took place with a major tightening of money and credit leading to recession.

The 1970s and 2000s crises were the result of mistaken views of the Central Bank and commercial bankers that they could take more risk and lend more money without adverse consequences. This was followed by too rapid a change of tack. Today we do not yet face a similar policy induced recession, but we need to be aware that the Bank of England is tightening too much which is visibly slowing the economy. Money growth is also being slowed a bit in the USA and China.

Wokingham Post Office

Knowing of worries about the possible move of the Post Office counters service from the Broad Street premises to a local shop, I am chasing an answer from the Post Office on why they wish to do this and what level of service they think they could supply with such a change. There is understandable apprehension that service could be worse if they refuse to engage and provide us with the rationale.

There is no cliff edge

I have heard all too many interviews by a few senior business people and their lobby group representatives telling us leaving without a deal will be “disastrous, catastrophic, falling off a cliff”. They should know better. If they wish to be credible witnesses they should cast aside wild and emotional language, and spell out exactly what they fear will happen that they think will be damaging. All too few interviewers challenge them to be precise.

I have tried to see why they hold their general view. They nearly always say the same things, that leaving without a deal will get in the way of their complex supply chains, making it more difficult to import their components. I find this difficult to believe.

They nearly all confess that their current supply chains include a minority of components that come from outside the EU. If being outside the single

market and customs union so disrupted trade with the rest of the world they would not have part of their just in time dependent on non EU supplies. If they can manage 10 components from outside the EU today they could manage 100 from outside the EU tomorrow. The WTO has worked hard on facilitation of trade to remove non tariff barriers.

The EU does impose some tariffs on some components that come in from outside the EU. The UK could offer tariff free components of all kinds once we have left and we can set our own tariff schedule. I suggest big manufacturers join me in pressing for this.

They suggest that there will be delays at the ports, especially at Dover-Calais, and these will disrupt Just In Time systems. I do not accept there need be additional delays, but if there was a regular increased time to transit the ports, you would just ask your supplier to allow for the longer journey time so the supplies still reached you when you wanted them. As they fit in Chinese supplies maybe taking 40 days to arrive by sea into current complex supply chains it shows that longer journey times are not deal breakers.

The main reason I do not expect new delays on imports is that the crucial importing port will be under UK control. There is no need for us to impose new processes and delays at the ports. We can adapt or continue the current system of checks away from the ports for any purposes we need. On the Dover-Calais route if more spot checks are needed on trucks then do them on the ferry or on the nearby train carrying the load through the Tunnel. There is plenty of competition to Dover-Calais Ro-Ro from containers, so in the unlikely event of difficulties at Calais there would other choices.

They sometimes say they will need more complete complex customs paperwork. This they say is an added cost, but not of course a delay as it is done usually before the lorry departs from the exporting factory. There will be little if any additional electronic paperwork in practise. All EU trade requires them to fill in a long and complex Intrastat declaration which overlaps with customs information. Most industrial and retail purchasers these days require extensive product information, with specification, cost, test results etc. A computer programme can send the bits of this the authorities need at the UK/EU electronic borders.

I suggest to the media they will be more convincing if they stick to the facts. What exactly are they worried about, and why don't we just fix it in the four months that remains before we leave.

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Postings to this site

Im very busy and finding there are too many postings from the same individual, and too many long postings in general. I have started deleting some just for length or long third or fourth posts that day. Please try and sum up what you say in shorter format if you want to be posted promptly otherwise I will go over to more deletions.