

Dont think the Withdrawal Agreement would just cost £39 bn

Most of us in the debate have accepted the Treasury estimate of the costs of the Withdrawal Agreement. However, there are no figures in the Agreement and certainly no cash limits on what we would have to pay. The readiness of the Remain establishment to use the £39 bn figure should be cause for concern. The out turn could be a lot higher.

The language is vague over how the sums will be calculated but tight and binding over our need to pay up. Under the Agreement the EU will set out how much it thinks we owe, and we have little power to push back and reduce it. No normal business or individual entering a contract would accept such an open ended and one sided arrangement. They will simply notify us of the bill, and charge us interest if we do not pay on time.

The pathetically weak UK negotiation even lost out badly over the European Investment Bank. As they want us out of it we should be repaid our capital and share of the accumulated reserves, At some point we gave up our rights to the reserves and would get our starting capital back on its own over an eleven year period. Meanwhile we remain on risk for our full starting proportion of uncalled capital. The accumulated profits and reserves are more than twice the called capital. so we get back under one third of what we are owed. There's a great one sided deal for the EU.

The EU told us the Withdrawal Agreement could not look forwards and tackle the future partnership, though it does where it suits them as over names of products from geographical areas. It also looks a long way forwards over money, requiring us to pay pensions for decades, to meet spending not yet committed and to meet benefit and public service charges for people not yet arrived here.

The UK is of course liable for full budget years 2019 and 2020 owing to effectively remaining in the EU without our vote and voice for the so called transition. We will pay our full share of own resources taxation and will continue to be liable after December 2020 for any money extra they wish to charge us. We will also be held liable for shares of commitments outstanding on December 31 2020 for payments to be made after we have left. and in the second year after we have left and beyond. There will be an attempt to have a final reckoning after 2028, though things like pensions payments go on long after that.

In other words the Treasury has effectively given them a series of blank cheques for a decade to come, without any apparent push back or argument over these huge and unspecified amounts. There are no figures in the main text of the Agreement to give the EU maximum flexibility to send us some big bills. What did the UK government think it was doing when it agreed to this?

Whiteknights Road

I was pleased to learn that the works to repair the pipes in Whiteknights Road have now been completed. I am told the full water supply has been restored. The Water company has apologised to customers and to road users for the inconvenience caused.

There is an alternative to Mrs May's plan – leave in March 2019

Mrs May's plan is not leaving the EU, but staying in for many more months, and buying the most expensive talks in history with more than £39bn of our money.

So the alternative is easy to explain and define. It is to leave in March 2019 in accordance with the EU Withdrawal Act and in accordance with the wishes of Leave voters in the referendum.

Amber Rudd undermines the Prime Minister

It is open to backbenchers and members of the public to be as critical of Mrs May's plan as we like and to propose an alternative. Those MPs who decide to stay in the Cabinet have to defend Mrs May's position, which is her deal is the only proposal worth considering.

This early move in Miss Rudd's probable leadership campaign is ill judged and ensures she will not get any Eurosceptic votes, as the Norway option is not leaving the EU. It means accepting EU laws, paying them money and staying in the single market and customs union which we voted to quit.

I have more confidence in the government than Ministers do

Ministers fanned out yesterday to spread gloom and doom around the country about what will happen if we just leave next March. It was a poor version of Project Fear, without even any novelty to amuse connoisseurs of this most popular political genre. We were told that the ports will jammed by our own Customs officials, leading to long delays. I don't believe them. The UK can put in the capacity it needs to handle any additional checks. If it fails to do so it will just have to let the lorries through against their pre filed electronic details as they do today whilst they put in capacity for additional checks. That is what I thought Customs officials had already told us.

So Ministers, I don't believe you. I think the UK port and government officials will handle it just fine. You will not have to resign for failing to plan and equip our ports properly for the task. I am sure you are up to it.

I also enjoyed the contradictions in the stories. We were told that in a worst case there will be six months of delays, yet the Health Secretary only thinks we need six weeks of stocks of medicines. It was a curious irony from the BBC that to describe what it would be like they looked back to what had actually happened to cross Channel trade in 2015 when we were still firmly in the EU. It was unhelpful then to face the disruption, but we got through it. I cant see why this should be bad like that, when on both sides of the Channel the authorities tell us they want it to work on 30 March.

Still the UK government has failed to set out its schedule of tariffs for March 30th. The Trade Secretary has promised me it is due any moment, so why shouldn't I believe him. I trust the schedule will say there will be no tariffs on imported components for UK car factories, shooting that particular fox of the Project Fear campaign.

Project Fear has done great damage to the reputation of the UK establishment. It has led them to make all too many nonsensical forecasts. It reminds Leave voters Remain still have nothing positive to say about the EU they seem to love so much. I was amused to see several Ministers decided to fulfill the instruction to meet business to tell Leave voters they were wrong in or near their own constituencies so their time was not completely wasted.