

The EU Council decisions

The EU Council endorsed the new proposals for European Parliament seats after 2019. The 73 UK seats disappear, with an overall reduction of 46 seats. Germany at 96 (n/c), France at 79 (plus 5) and Italy at 76 (plus 3) will be the largest in the new Parliament out of a total of 705. It shows that some of the planning for the UK exit soon is progressing.

The 27 agreed a line on Brexit which is far from friendly to the UK. They are only holding out the hope of some "political declaration" about the future relationship, yet seem to expect the UK to sign up to the very one sided Withdrawal Agreement they have in mind nonetheless. To make that worse they are still insisting on some "back stop" for the Irish border, which is their way of trying to get the UK back into the Customs Union we voted to leave. The UK would be wise to point out we have no need to sign any Withdrawal Agreement unless there is a really good proposal for the future which would offset the penal terms of their Withdrawal document.

The Cabinet will be seeking to hammer out a more detailed proposal on the future relationship at their meeting at the end of next week at Chequers. I trust they will recognise the so called New Customs Partnership is badly holed, and was rejected by the Brexit Cabinet Committee when last examined. They should also veto any idea of ending up in a version of the customs union and or single market just for goods. The EU is the big winner from the current goods arrangements, so the UK has no need to pay to continue those arrangements, and must ensure it takes back control of its laws and trade policy when we leave.

I repeat my advice to the government. Table a comprehensive free trade agreement for goods and services. If the EU is well disposed, then negotiate over it. If the EU is not, then just leave without signing any Withdrawal Agreement. The government says all is going well with plans to leave with No Deal, so lets make sure the EU know that. So far the EU has turned down every constructive UK suggestion. They have even managed to turn a very generous UK offer on defence and security into a UK demand they cannot meet!