

The EU wants to rely on the WTO as the UK leaves to be an active member and supporter of the WTO

The EU spent hours arguing over migration policy, with Italy opposing the draft Council conclusions. Finally they reached agreement with a few face saving formulas for the disputants.

Mrs Merkel got language into the document about countering “secondary movements of asylum seekers between member states” The German Interior Minister is demanding a stop to migrants moving from Italy across the German border to take jobs, benefits and housing in Germany. I don't see how this weak phrase solves that problem, nor see how the EU with freedom of movement and Schengen rules could prevent a lawful refugee from moving from country A to country B if they wish.

Italy got language in about exploring how migrant centres could be set up outside the EU to process applications. There is no commitment to implement such a policy, no special budget, and as yet no idea of where and how this could be done. It may be enough for the Italian PM for the summer, but Mr Salvini will need some tangible answers. Italy wants an end to boats arriving with many migrants now.

The end of the Council presented a friendly face because no-one had lost or been slapped down. Instead the issues drift on to another Council. The one positive out of it for all of us was a new found enthusiasm for the World Trade Organisation. The EU agreed unanimously to commit to “ a comprehensive approach to improving...the functioning of the WTO” and to promote the “strengthening of the WTO as an institution”. As the UK shifts from reliance on EU membership to direct reliance on WTO membership for all trade matters, it is good to know the EU takes its membership of the WTO seriously and wants to work with the UK and other like minded members of the WTO to cut trade costs and remove more barriers.