

The government needs to press on with the No Deal option

The result of offering too many compromises with the EU is it will make the Deal option less attractive than the No Deal Option. Paying large sums for a Free Trade deal makes no sense, when tariffs would be a cheaper way where we can give the tariff money back to the UK consumers who paid it. Accepting EU control of our laws, trade policy, migration policy and other matters after March 2019 means we don't take back control.

The PM's speech says considerably less than the versions of commentary that have been built on the back of it. She argues that we want as short a transition as possible, and says we need to be able to run our own affairs from the moment we leave the EU. That is not the same as spending two more years in the EU and calling it transition. She said "I don't believe either the EU or the British people want the UK to stay longer in the existing structure than is necessary", so let's get on with sorting everything out now. It need not be that difficult.

On money she says they might agree to stay in certain programmes where we would agree cash for benefits. I have no problem with that, though there are no programmes which are a must as far as I am concerned, We can replicate the worthwhile ones for ourselves. She also reaffirmed we will "honour commitments we have made during the period of our membership" which some interpret to mean making full contributions up to the end of the present 7 year budget cycle. There is no legal requirement to do that.

It is not possible to have a meaningful conversation about Transition or Interim arrangements without having a Deal agreed, or at least knowing the outlines of what the EU will offer and accept. I wish the PM well in her effort to get meaningful talks going. I am not persuaded that we owe them any money or that we want to stay in for moment longer than our legal requirement up to March 2019.

What the civil service have to grasp is there is no cliff edge. It is quite possible for the UK to have functioning borders and trade arrangements on March 2019 even with no deal. 160 other countries trade daily with the EU and most have no special Trade Agreement. The priority must be to get everything in order for 2019 exit. That will also strengthen our bargaining position for a better deal, showing we are ready and willing to just leave. The EU's response to the speech shows that they will just go on pushing for more and more money to make sure it is bad deal.