

The Irish border

I look forward to the government pressing ahead with a solution to the issues over the Irish border that preserves an open border on the UK side. The government has set out in papers how this can be done. It would be good if the EU bought into the UK solution, or provided an acceptable alternative.

Some people who claim there has to be a hard border once we leave the EU need to understand the nature of the current border. Whilst it is true there are no custom dues to levy on products within the EU crossing the border, it is still a currency, VAT, Income and Corporation tax border. It does require processing the right paperwork or electronic information to ensure the correct authorities levy the appropriate VAT, Income Tax, Corporation tax and the rest, and the right exchange rate is applied to transactions.

The Republic of Ireland has a standard rate of VAT of 23% compared to the UK 20%, but also has three lower rates and a zero levy depending on products. The Republic only charges Corporation Tax on trading Income at 12.5% compared to the UK 19%. All of these differences are handled without needing a physical barrier and checks at the border, so it would also be possible to levy customs duties in the same way without a customs post and delay for trucks. Registered importers and exporters can notify electronically and pay electronically. Small trade activities by locals crossing the border regularly could be exempt.

Both sides to the negotiations say they wish to keep the Common Travel area, so there is no need for new border barriers to deal with people. The UK and the Irish authorities already have in place methods for dealing with illegal migrants and criminals seeking entry.

How many more times do we have to go over this well trodden ground? The UK government should just press ahead with its plans for leaving in March 2019