

The UK negotiating strategy

The UK government is about to publish a series of position papers on the EU negotiations. It is doing so in part in response to the EU's tactic of publishing lots of papers about principles and problems, whilst refusing to tackle the issues that matter or to set out the EU wishes.

It is most important as the UK does this that it avoids three mistakes. The first mistake is to give any hint of us negotiating with ourselves. We don't want options or details over how the UK position may evolve. We certainly don't want a public exploration of what we might surrender or shift under pressure, as that invites the EU to hang tough and to pocket any offer we make.

The second mistake would be to claim it is all complex or difficult in a way which gives succour to those in the EU who think if they delay and obfuscate enough the UK might weaken or change its mind.

The third mistake would be to ask for too much expecting things that are not obtainable. It is not, for example, in the UK's power to decide what rights going forward will apply to UK citizens living in the EU after we have left. That will be a matter for them to decide, under international law.

The negotiation can be very straightforward. The UK takes back control of its money, laws and borders, as it is entitled to do. The EU decides whether it wants the comprehensive free trade arrangement we offer, or whether they want to face WTO tariffs.