

There is no soft or hard Brexit

I do not know how many more times I have to argue the obvious. There is Brexit, or there is staying in the EU. The EU has made it crystal clear you cannot stay in the single market without accepting freedom of movement and paying contributions, two things the people clearly rejected in the referendum and again in the General election. You cannot stay in the Customs Union if you want to have free trade deals with the rest of the world.

The Labour Manifesto in 2017 stated they accepted the decision of the referendum. They set out policies to negotiate a range of new free trade and investment agreements with non EU countries that assume we are leaving the single market and the Customs Union. The Manifesto talked positively about a new trading relationship they wished to negotiate, again assuming the current one stemming from single market and customs union membership had gone. Their document stated that “freedom of movement will end when we leave the EU”. The Conservative and DUP Manifestos also made clear we will be leaving the single market and Customs Union and looked forward to new free trade deals around the world.

So we have overwhelming agreement, endorsed by 86% of the voters in the election, that the UK will run her own immigration policy and her own trade policy on leaving. People in the UK have to grasp that arguing amongst ourselves about what our negotiating position should be, when the government has already set one out, can only help those in the EU institutions who wish to harm the UK. Fortunately most of the member states want access to our market and want good relations with us for a wide variety of reasons. Fortunately also the Lisbon Treaty has in Clause 8 a clear legal requirement that the EU itself seeks an “area of prosperity and good neighbourliness” with us. We know how keen Commissioners are to stick to the law of the Treaty.

I am optimistic about the negotiations. It would help our country if more people got behind the government’s stance. After all what the government wants is what all say they want – good access to the single market, and many collaborations and joint workings based on bilateral agreement. To change stance now would undermine us. We negotiate with the rest of the EU, not amongst ourselves!