

This election is about the kind of country we want to be.

The UK General election is both about who should lead our country for the next five years, and what kind of a country we want to create. It is an unusually important election, because the UK has great opportunities now it is leaving the EU. We need to leave in a way which brings more people together in our country. That requires reassurance to all that we are leaving the EU, not Europe. None of us want to damage our economy. We are not out to undermine the many friendly and positive collaborations and friendships UK people and companies share with the continent. We do not wish to turn inward. More than ever the UK needs strong and stable leadership, to negotiate a decent future relationship with other EU member states. I want to see an outward looking, optimistic UK, engaged in the wider world and a pioneer of freer trade on a global basis.

As the official Brexit campaign argued, the UK will not use our departure to undermine the employee protections embedded in EU law. The Conservative leadership has stressed that all existing minimum standards and protections will be transferred into UK law. As governments of all persuasions have in the past, so a future Conservative government wishes to go further than the EU standards. As the Labour party also supports this approach that should be one fear of Brexit removed.

So far there has been no downturn as forecast by some in the Remain campaign who thought the act of voting for Brexit, or the sending of the letter, would bring on an early recession. There is no need for there to be so once we do leave, either. An important task for the new government will be to extend and improve the economic recovery. So far since the banking crash and slump of 2008-9, we have seen good job creation and moderate growth. Setting the right tax rates, allowing sensible levels of public spending to improve the NHS, schools and other crucial services, and creating a climate friendly to investment and enterprise is central to building on what has been achieved since 2010.

There is no such thing as hard or soft Brexit. Remaining a member of the single market is not on offer. Being in the customs Union would prevent us having better arrangements with the rest of the world. It is mightily in the interests of the other member states to have a free trade agreement with the UK, so that may well happen. If it does not in time for our exit, we will be able to trade with them under WTO rules as we do with the rest of the world at the moment.

As we come out we need to legislate for a new UK fishing policy kinder to both our fish and our fishermen. We need to set up a new system of agricultural support, that is sensitive to the UK rural landscape and helps promote more domestic food production. We can get rid of EU taxes we do not like.

I think in a few years time we will have more and better friendly contacts and partnerships with people and companies on the continent. Just as staying out the Euro allowed the City to be Europe's major fund raising market, so being out of the EU will not impede more trade, investment, academic and cultural exchange. Our future relations will rest of the good will and commonsense of people on both sides of the Channel, not on the sometimes unhelpful words of a few EU officials.

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