

Those Brexit talks again

It was Brexit day again in the Commons yesterday. The EU continued its miserable commentary. Earlier this week it talked up talks with Mr Corbyn in the hope that would split the UK. Yesterday they decided to reject the PM's friendly offer.

Prime Minister set out where we are with the talks. Good progress is being made on issues including healthcare, the Irish border and the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in EU countries. There is no meeting of minds on money, and no agreement yet from the EU side to talk about the future relationship. From the UK's point of view there is nothing to be gained from the so called divorce, and every reason to discuss all relevant matters about the future as soon as possible. We would not need any implementation period if we used the remaining eighteen months before exit intelligently.

The Prime Minister is right to remain optimistic, positive and friendly, offering a good future partnership on trade and security to the other EU states. She is also right to plan for No Deal, as she stressed she is, just in case the EU continues to overplay its hand by resisting talks about the future relationship in good time. Showing No Deal can work is not only prudent in case the talks fail, but also sensible as it reminds the EU that an Agreement is only worth having if it is better than No Deal.

It never ceases to amaze me just how much the media make of no news on talks. There could be months more of this shadow boxing. We may not know for a year whether there is going to be a deal or not. We must use this time to show business how trucks will move through ports, planes will fly, financial services will be traded and laws will be enforced after 30 March 2019 without a deal. There is no cliff edge. The rest of the world trades with the EU without belonging to it. The UK can transfer its trade account from Brussels to Geneva and to the WTO where we will be welcomed as an advocate of free trade, and can use the various agreements and protocols of that organisation to ensure smooth trade.

I have spent the last three weeks with Parliament in recess talking to various business audiences and in meetings to hear the worries of traders. No new issues have emerged above the ones we have often discussed on this site. It is a pity the EU cannot put in place a proper mandate for its negotiators soon, as there are good ways of improving on No Deal that would help both sides. The issue the EU has to get round to answering is how many barriers and tariffs do they wish to place on their trade with us, bearing in mind they are limited in what they can do by world trade rules. It is bizarre that both sides say they support free trade and prosperous commerce, and both agree they have a good basis for trade at the moment. So does one side, the EU side, really want to damage it? If they do they will find they do more damage to themselves than to the UK, given the big imbalance in trade and the nature of the goods and services traded.

Meanwhile as the PM reminded Parliament voted to take back control of our money , our laws and our borders. The government has to deliver that as soon as possible. Its such a pity the EU overplays its weak hand, which takes the EU closer to facing self imposed barriers on its access to our lucrative market.