

Three Ministers resign over the Chequers statement

I was not surprised by the resignations. The Chequers statement brought to the surface arguments that had been underway for many months. David Davis felt his department and his advice was being sidelined by the Cabinet Office officials. He had argued against the EU's sequencing of the talks, and had sought to dig in more over money and the so called Withdrawal Agreement. Boris Johnson felt his advice was also being ignored when he set out an upbeat and optimistic view of Brexit. He complains about the extent of the concessions made and possibly planned.

Some people close to the PM made it worse by the silly briefings that Ministers would have to walk home if they resigned at the Chequers meeting, and by effectively challenging some Ministers to leave the government. Today in the Commons the Prime Minister robustly defended the red lines that matter to many of us. She assured us that freedom of movement will end, we will have our own migration policy, we will not pay large sums into the EU and will be able to sign our own trade deals.

However, the small print of the Chequers statement implies her officials do think we need to make concessions that rub out these important red lines. It is these apparent contradictions between the principles and the detail that has caused all the trouble. A majority of the country, Brexit voting and some Remain voting, want reassurance that the government will implement the wishes of the people. That does mean taking back control of all our laws, borders, money and trade policy. It is difficult to see how this is compatible with a deal that ties our hands on goods and agricultural business and trade. Nor does the detailed language rule out some payments, some role for the European Court and some side deal to allow more migration.

We are told a few large companies think a failure to negotiate some customs deal will be damaging to them. It is difficult to see why. These claims are similar to the claims such businesses made to force us into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, which proved an economic disaster. They are also similar to the statements of some big businesses that they would stop investing in the UK or might withdraw if we failed to join the Euro. Instead they stayed and invested more. We have just had a devaluation against the Euro of more than 10%, so the UK has just become a lot more competitive. Our trade is not at risk if we leave and trade under WTO rules.