

[Mrs Merkel, Mr Macron and free trade](#)

The Merkel and Macron speeches at Davos were hailed by the media as statements promoting free trade. If we are to believe them, they should take up the UK's offer of a comprehensive free trade agreement between the UK and EU and make sure it is complete by March 2019.

[Transition to what?](#)

I have told Ministers this week that I do not want a two year Transition period agreed anytime soon before we know what if anything we are going to transit to. If there is no Agreement on a comprehensive Free Trade deal and wider partnership then we should just leave in March 2019 and get the full benefits immediately of paying them no more money and being able to change our laws and control our own borders as we see fit. That is what Leave voters voted for.

The Prime Minister has always said she would consider an Implementation period after March 2019, but that implies there is an Agreement to implement. She also said it should be as short as possible, and of variable duration depending on the clauses of the Agreement to be implemented and their complexities. None of this is needed if there is no acceptable deal. Her argument for considering an Implementation period was to avoid a double adjustment – first to being out, then to the terms of a new Agreement. That makes sense. By definition you cannot know what if anything you need for implementation before you have even started negotiating the trade agreement.

Neither Remain nor Leave voters will be happy if we replicate the obligations and costs of EU membership without any longer being a voting member of the Council. Leave must mean leave. That means taking back control of our money, our borders and our laws, and leaving on 29 March 2019 as agreed.

[Unemployment down again in Wokingham](#)

The Wokingham constituency figures for unemployed people fell again in December 2017, and were 35 down on December 2016. Those between the ages of 18-24 saw a welcome decline of 25, leaving 45 now without a job. Total unemployment in Wokingham is at 0.7% of the workforce. This means Wokingham is the seventh lowest unemployment rate of all 650 constituencies in the

country.

It is good news that unemployment is so low, and good news that Wokingham recovered well from the great recession at the end of the last decade which did cause substantial job losses. A number of local employers are looking for new employees, so those who remain out of work have opportunities to find something suitable.

The Treaty of Sandhurst

Last week the government concluded a new Treaty with France, called the "treaty concerning the reinforcement of co-operation for the co-ordinated management of our shared border". I have called it the Sandhurst treaty, in honour of the place where it was solemnized.

Parliament has recently submitted the EU Withdrawal Bill to intensive scrutiny. Hundreds of amendments have been debated, 45 votes taken on the ones most favoured by the Bill's opponents, and 12 days of lengthy discussion on a Bill whose main purpose is to ensure continuity of law once we leave the EU in accordance with the instructions of the voters.

I have no problems with Parliament doing its job thoroughly. I want a strong Parliament. What I would now like is for those same Opposition MPs to be equally demanding when it comes to other things that are happening.

Lets take last week's new Treaty with France. It provides for the UK to send more money to the French government to reinforce the border, and for the UK to take more migrants from France. The government did not offer a Statement or debate to explain this, and are not proposing any Parliamentary process to examine and approve the new Treaty. So why did the Opposition, newly enamoured of the Parliamentary process, not seek an Urgent Question to find out what was going on? Why have they not proposed a debate in Opposition time if the government does not propose a debate in its time on this matter? Why does the Opposition complain about the Executive needing to have powers to transfer EU laws already agreed into good UK law but have no problem with the government signing a new Treaty with obligations on the UK?

The Treaty of Sandhurst is a development of previous Treaty collaboration on the Anglo French border in France. The underlying principle that it is easiest to police that border for people leaving France in France, and for people leaving the UK in the UK is clearly a good one which we wish to uphold. I still find it odd that the newly active Opposition forces in Parliament have nothing to say on this and allow the executive to do as they wish without comment or vote.

EU negotiations

There may be EU negotiations for most or even all of this year. Those who want me to write about this and nothing else for the rest of the year will be disappointed. I have not written about them recently as there were no formal negotiations underway over the Christmas and New Year period. The next big event will be the March EU Council.

Some of you think I am not writing about it because I have changed my mind of what we should offer and how we should proceed. Let me assure you that is not the case. I remain strongly of the view that whilst the government would like a comprehensive free trade deal the base case is leaving with the WTO option for trade with the rest of the EU, just as we do with the rest of the world today. This option would mean no extra payments to the EU. It means we would take back control of our laws, our borders and our trade negotiations from March 30 2019. I am happy for the government to go on negotiating to see if it can produce a better outcome than this. If it does then that is good news. If it does not, then under the government's rubric that no deal is better than bad deal it should politely decline the EU offer.

I do not see the need for any additional transitional period after March 2019 if we are simply leaving. I read that we can be ready for trade under WTO rules by March 2019 if that is what happens. As the PM has said, if we do secure a better deal then there might be some need for a variable implementation period for parts of that deal which can be settled when we know the deal. What we should want to avoid is negotiating a 2 year further transitional period after March 2019 which turns into a prolonged negotiation again. I don't see how it is more likely we can do a good deal in 2020 if we have been unable to secure one in 2017 and 2018. To try would simply extend the uncertainty further which is a bad idea.

Time will tell what the government wish to recommend. We do know that the government agrees we will not remain in the single market or customs union, that we do need to end the uncertainty as soon as possible, and that no deal is better than a bad deal. They also agree that we need to take back control of our borders and our laws and need to be able to enter our own new trade agreements on leaving. We also know that they have indicated money will be paid in addition to our contributions up to leaving date. They will need to show that they are getting something for such a generous offer. Any deal they accept will need primary legislation to go through both Houses of Parliament to provide the authority to implement it.