

How are the EU and Turkish border fences and walls going?

Last year I drew attention to the big work programme highlighted on the EU website to strengthen Turkey's borders as part of its Visa Liberalisation programme with the EU. The officials wrote that they needed "ditch excavation, lighting, wire entanglement, trellis fence, road maintenance and construction and modular wall construction" along the extended Turkish border with Syria and Iraq. It would be good to have an update on how far they have got with their 900 km Syria/Turkey wall.

I raise it again because many in the EU are hostile to Mrs Trump's proposal to extend the already substantial USA/Mexico wall. I wonder why they apply different standards to this wall than to the ones the EU is helping finance and design closer to home. I invite proponents of the EU to tell us why they think these two walls are different, and why they support the Turkish one which is part of the EU/Turkey Agreement.

The EU approved border controls including ones along EU borders can incorporate watch towers, constant camera surveillance and plenty of "guards" to deal with any problems at crossing points. The 10th action point in the 72 point "Visa Liberalisation Roadmap" is to ensure sufficient well trained guards and surveillance equipment at crossing points. The 33rd point in the 72 point "Visa Liberalisation roadmap" agreed with Turkey by the EU is to "ensure effective expulsion of illegally residing 3rd country nationals."

If it is moral to oppose border walls and barriers in Mexico, surely it is similarly necessary to oppose them in Europe and Middle East?

German inflation outstrips UK

In confirmation that the rise in western inflation is mainly to do with rising commodity prices, especially oil, German CPI inflation today hit 1.9% compared to the UK's 1.6%. It confirms that inflation in the UK is not special to UK and has not been caused by sterling weakness and Brexit.

Allies, friends and trade partners

A country needs good allies, some friendly countries and many trade partners.

A country cannot run its allies or control their governments. It can try to influence them, and work to common standards. I think the USA is a strong enough democracy to sort out the concerns about the temporary travel ban. It has already been modified following court and political action. The Vice President himself called the original version unconstitutional.

It is not feasible for a country to provide a permanent running commentary on all the decisions and views of all its allies and certainly not of all its trading partners. There are many features of undemocratic regimes we do not like, yet we carry on trading with them. Some of us did not like the USA's use of Guantanamo Bay for detention without charge or trial, but we kept our stance as an ally of Mr Obama's USA. A UK company has recently signed a contract to supply arms to Turkey, a NATO ally. Are we happy with all Turkey's policies? The EU has been helping Turkey build frontier walls. Are we content with that? That after all is being done our money and in our name as an EU member.

Today many say we have to take a further view on Mr Trump's policies. What do you think the UK should say and do?

There is no legal basis for making any extra payments to the EU

There are some on the continent who seem to think the UK will have to pay to leave the EU, based around negotiations over how much of the continuing liabilities of the EU the UK must pay. This is all nonsense.

There is no power in the EU Treaties to impose an additional one off levy on a state as it leaves the EU. Nor is there any power in the Treaty to demand any continuing budget contributions after departure. This is wise, as of course once a state leaves it leaves behind the judicial authority of the EU which would be the means of enforcing any such payment. Article 50 is clear. Once the state leaves it has no further rights and benefits, and no further duties or obligations.

It is of course true the Treaty does not prevent the EU accepting a payment volunteered by a departing state if it wished to pay one. However, the UK could not make such a payment legally under our own law and system for controlling public spending. Ministers can only authorise spending and sign cheques for approved expenditure under UK legislation and with Parliamentary

authority for the budget provision that covers the payments. Ministers have proper authority to make the annual contribution payments to the EU, required by the Treaty as incorporated into UK law by the European Communities Act. They have absolutely no authority to make one off additional payments to the EU, and would have no authority to make contributions after we have left and have repealed the 1972 Act.

They will also find that if they wanted to make a payment as overseas aid to the EU it would not qualify under our Aid budget criteria, as the EU as a whole is too rich. The only way UK Ministers could authorise a leaving payment would be to put through an Act of Parliament specifically authorising such an ex gratia payment. I can't see many Conservative MPs wanting to vote for that.

Being in the EU is a bit like being a student in a College. All the time you belong to the College you have to pay fees. You have to obey all the rules of the institution. When you depart you have no further financial obligations, and you no longer have to obey their rules and accept their discipline. If you liked the College rules you can still apply them to yourself voluntarily. The College does not on your departure say we have borrowed money to improve the College while you were here so you will have a continuing bill for servicing the College debts. It does not say we failed to make proper provision for the future pensions of the people who taught you, so we will send you additional bills for their pensions. All your rights to reside and learn at the College cease, and all your duties to pay and obey cease. So it is with a country's membership of the EU.

Problems in eastern Europe

One of the most disappointing things about the high strategy of the EU has been its approach to Eastern Europe. Today there remain substantial problems on the eastern frontier of the Union.

In Turkey the President is seeking referendum endorsement for more centralised power. The President wants more control over the appointment of Judges, the ending of the office of Prime Minister and general rights to run the country as he sees fit. The EU clashed with the President over the recent coup attempt and they have been critical of his record on human rights. It looks as if after years of offering Turkey the prospect of membership of the EU, Germany and the others are cooling on the idea. Last year's promise of accelerated progress in achieving Turkish accession has been replaced by a distinct distancing. Instead of it being possible to get over the obstacles, EU sources seem more inclined now to play up the difficulties in the way of membership.

On the one hand Mrs Merkel and some of the other leaders seeking re election at home may find it convenient to distance themselves from their previous

decision to speed up Turkish membership. On the other hand they face a big problem anyway, thanks to the EU/Turkey Association Agreement. This creates freer movement of people from Turkey into the Schengen area of the EU. The Turks are becoming unhappy about the lack of EU support for them in their task as acting host to more than 3 million refugees from the Middle East. Were they to encourage many of those people to head westwards into the EU Mrs Merkel would have a major problem on her hands.

In Serbia the EU has also been negotiating possible membership. Last week Serbia was to initiate a new train service into Kosovo, which had emerged from the various talks with the EU over how there could be some rapprochement between Serbia and Kosovo after their separation in 2008. The decision of the Serbian authorities to implement this idea with a train that had painted prominently down its sides the message "Kosovo belongs to Serbia" led to a furious exchange with Kosovo. Serbia had to accept the train would not be allowed over the frontier. Clinton and Blair are remembered fondly in Kosovo for assistance in their struggle with Serbia. What is the EU going to do about the tensions that have flared again between these two?

We have often discussed the EU's approach to Ukraine and their role in the run up to the illegal annexation of Crimea by a Russia which both saw an opportunity and felt a threat to its naval presence in Crimea. There are no signs of any resolution of this dispute either.

The EU has to be careful not to overstretch. Its long and weak eastern frontier is the source of instability, at a time when the western countries are wanting to turn their backs on migrant flows and the problems of the Middle East for electoral reasons.