

What does the EU want from the Brexit discussions?

You would have thought the rest of the EU would be delighted to learn that the UK, the most reluctant EU member of them all, was leaving. It means they are free to pursue economic, monetary and political union without the UK constantly trying to slow it down, impede or stop it, or demanding special treatment. Better still, that same UK is happy to make her market available tariff free to the rest of the EU who have been so successful at exploiting it.

Instead it appears that the EU is once again misjudging the mood of UK voters. The EU seems to think if it delays and creates difficulties the UK may think again or come creeping back for some version of its membership. The EU has invented the idea that the UK owes the EU a lot of money after we have left when there is no Treaty basis for this. They have proposed that the UK has to continue to accept rulings of the European Court of Justice in the way no other independent country that is an EU trading partner has to accept. They have suggested that EU citizens currently legally settled in the UK would continue to have EU rights policed by the EU instead of enjoying UK rights policed by the UK after exit. These are presumably provocative proposals designed to foment argument within the UK with a view to delaying Brexit.

The EU needs to learn from its recent experiences. It was this mentality which led the EU to turn down Mr Cameron's modest requests for improvements in the UK/EU relationship and which led directly to the Leave vote. They underestimated the resolve of UK voters then, and are in danger of doing so again. Indeed, their current attitude reinforces the view of many UK voters that they made exactly the right choice. The process of exit is also serving to underline just how far our subservience to EU lawmaking and courts has gone, something hard line pro EU campaigners always denied prior to the decision.

As someone who has undertaken all too many debates on this topic, I was regularly accused of exaggerating the influence and power of Brussels, which was just a kind of large free trade arrangement according to many of its protagonists. Now they tell us it is all so complex and comprehensive it makes getting out all but impossible.

My advice to the EU is simple. The UK has voted decisively to leave, with a massive Parliamentary majority to carry out the wishes of the voters. The UK wishes to be friendly and generous in departure. Indeed, many of us think we will be a better partner and neighbour when we can make our own decisions, than when we were constantly having to fight against imposed collective decisions we did not like. The EU can do a good deal for itself if it wishes. It can secure free trade, defence collaboration, protected rights for EU citizens settled in the UK and much more. If it doesn't want to do that we will be leaving anyway.