

Another round of Project fear

It is strange to read stories coming from people in or close to the government telling us leaving without a deal will be bad, saying the government has not done all it needs to do to leave on March 29, and playing up any bad economic or business news that comes along. Normally governments are guilty of putting too optimistic a spin on events. Not this one, who often seem to prefer the EU spin line against us.

Most of it is Project Fear reheated. It was that very Project Fear replete with precise and wildly wrong forecasts for jobs, house prices, growth and business for 2016-17 that did much to lose the vote for Remain. Most of us want sensible optimism not remorseless and inaccurate pessimism.

The Prime Minister and government has had 2 years 7 months to get everything ready to leave on March 29. They have told us officially they can do that, though there are plenty of leaks, hints, statements of individual off message Ministerial opinion saying the opposite. The PM has always been consistent in saying we will leave on 29 March with or without a deal. She has always said you cannot take no deal off the table as it is important to the negotiation, and has always said we can just leave if necessary. She of course would much prefer a deal, but has difficulty persuading MPs her Withdrawal Agreement is acceptable. It is of an expensive invitation to another 21 months of talks about a future relationship. This prolongs the uncertainty for business and delays an economic boost from spending our former EU contributions on our priorities.

It is clear the planes will fly, the trucks will pass through Calais and Dover in good time and there will be no food or drug shortages. I am not going to stockpile anything. It looks as if the pressure for a second referendum has abated, which anyway cannot be held before 29 March now. The Remain forces in Parliament now want delay. They have failed to say what we could agree after March that we have been unable to agree in the 2 years 9 months since the vote, and failed to spell out why the EU would let us have a delay to renegotiate and on what terms. The UK has no plans to offer candidates for the European parliament so will not be part of the full governance arrangements of the EU from that date. We need to get on with leaving. I am still pressing the UK government to offer a free trade agreement and use of Article 24 of the GATT to avoid tariffs and other new barriers when we leave in March