

Reply to President Macron

Dear President Macron

Thank you for your letter addressed to the UK on the occasion of our departure from the EU. My country looks forward to welcoming you personally to the UK for your next visit, and wishes to have friendly relations with you as our neighbouring state as with the rest of the EU.

As an independent nation we support free trade, democracy and peace and will work to promote all three with our allies and friends. We regard the question of membership of the EU as something for the peoples and governments of each country to decide without external interference. We will work closely with fellow European countries whether non members like Norway and Switzerland or members like France and Germany on issues where we have a common interest or viewpoint.

I was disappointed to see that you have not understood why so many people in the UK voted to leave the EU in the first place and why so many voted in the two subsequent General elections for parties that wished to see Brexit through. You state that you need a "sovereign and democratic Europe whose strength will make our continent strong". You may well think the EU needs to have a stronger central government which is more efficient and effective at doing things. Your task is to explain that vision of greater EU integration and power both to the EU itself where the Germans are sometimes more reluctant than you going forward, and to your own voters who do not all share that vision. I can assure you that the pro Brexit majority in the UK was fundamentally opposed to more EU political integration, and wanted powers back from the EU for the UK which the EU decided not to offer. As a bare minimum we wanted control over our taxes, benefits and borders, areas where UK governments had previously falsely assured us we would retain a veto.

It is not now for the UK to tell the EU what level of political or economic integration is appropriate because we are no longer members with vote and voice. We wish you all well in coming to a happy outcome. I note making a success of a single currency usually requires substantially more political, budgetary and economic integration than the EU has so far achieved. It usually needs what the Germans somewhat disparagingly call a "transfer union". When I with others ran a successful campaign to persuade the UK not to join the Euro it was obvious the UK needed a different relationship with the EU, whilst the EU proceeded on the false assumption that it was only a matter of time before the UK gave in and joined the currency.

You state that UK access to the single market will depend on the "degree to which EU rules are accepted". The UK is leaving so we can make our own laws. The government has made clear we seek a Free Trade Agreement if there is a mutually beneficial one that is better than trading with each other on best or favoured nation WTO terms. Japan and Canada have

good FTAs with the EU that do not require accepting EU legislative supremacy. You should also remember that the EU seeks preferential access to the UK market, which it has enjoyed for many years. Our mutual trade account is dominated by EU exports, not by UK exports. We are happy to offer continued tariff free and relatively barrier free entry to the UK in return for similar access to the EU despite the big imbalance in trade in the EU's favour.

Brexit voters voted to leave the single market and customs union and do not share your rosy view of these devices. Many think the EU sees the UK as a Treasure island, to take our money and to sell us many goods on terms denied the rest of the world. We do not think the single market was created by UK Ministers. As the UK's single market Minister in the crucial period prior to the 1992 so called completion of the single market I remember fighting many battles at the time trying to make the single market less of an excuse for a power grab with a big build up in bureaucracy over business. Some of the large companies who now support EU rules in those days wanted me to argue against many of them or to water them down on the grounds that they made things dearer but not better and were hostile to innovation. .

I watched sadly our first ten years of membership of the EEC. As I predicted at the time, the shock of removing all tariffs on goods where Germany and to a lesser extent France and Italy had a comparative advantage over us, without removing barriers to a wide range of services where the UK had an advantage resulted in a big increase in our trade deficit with the EU which continued throughout our membership. More importantly it led to a halving of our car output, to a large reduction in our steel output, to the closure of many foundries and textile mills. No wonder I and many like me developed or confirmed a negative view of the EEC/EU. This was made far worse by the disaster of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism inflicted on us by the EU and the governing elite in the UK.

So please understand we want to be friends with the EU and with its individual member states. We are happy to trade freely with you even though it helps EU exporters more than our own. We see no need to sacrifice further or pay more for our future relationship. Your letter implies the EU has learned nothing and still does not understand why we left. We left to be an independent country. You cannot drag us back under EU control because it suits the EU.

You mention Winston Churchill. He did indeed want a more integrated Europe but never thought the UK would be part of it. He wrote his History of the English speaking peoples to set out his view that the UK needed closer ties with the USA and other Countries in his history.

With every good wish

John Redwood

Brexit speech last night

One of the first votes I cast as a young man was to vote to leave the EEC in 1975. I read the Treaty of Rome and realised this was no simple common market. I thought we were being lied to by the establishment who told us we could veto anything we did not like and would not lose our sovereignty, as the Treaty made clear wide ranging ambitions by the Europeans on their chosen path to "ever closer union".

I accepted the democratic decision of the UK voters and did my best for many years to believe in the common market and to limit the EU's activities to those of a common market. I only called for a second referendum a generation later when several new Treaties had transferred large powers to the EU and it was quite obvious this was well removed from the common market people thought they had voted for. It was helping lead the campaign to keep the pound that marked the turning point. The UK's eventual rejection of the main feature of European integration meant we had to seek a new and different relationship from those countries signed up to the federal state agenda. I launched the idea that joining a single currency was like sharing a bank account with the neighbours. It turned out to be an accurate metaphor, and one which most UK voters rejected as a policy for our country. The Euro predictably caused intense economic distress in various Euro countries.

Tonight is an historic occasion. We are well on the way to being an independent self governing nation again. The government now needs to be firm as well as friendly to the EU in the talks ahead. We should not make any more concessions. Our fish are not be bargained away again, our laws must be under our sole control, and our money repatriated. The EU needs a Free Trade Agreement more than we do as it is such a big exporter to us, so we must stand firm in negotiation. The UK has been Treasure Island for the EU, both as a source of tax revenue for their plans, and as a great market for their exports. They should now be decent and honour their promise of a Free Trade Agreement with no penal clauses.

When we leave the Implementation period at the end of the year I will celebrate more. We will once again be that free independent country we were for centuries before we joined the EU. We will be a world leader for free trade, peace and democracy. We will regain our vote and our voice on international bodies. We will be true to our traditions of being engaged with Europe but not governed by Europe's main continental powers. The UK has long championed the rights of smaller nations, democracy and the importance of national self determination in Europe.

We will be free to set out own taxes, so we can remove VAT from green products, from repairs to charitable buildings and from female hygiene products.

We are already shaking off the Maastricht debt requirements as the central driver of our economic policy and replacing it with the aims of promoting growth and prosperity.

We will be able to pass the laws that people want, and spend all our tax revenues on our priorities.

I always thought myself lucky to be born into a country that so valued and defended freedom and democracy. I was always humbled by the knowledge of the sacrifices my grandparents and parents made with their generations to keep us free.

Tonight I am again proud to be British, and optimistic that we can do so much better once we have truly taken back control.

My intervention during the debate on the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Bill, 28th January 2020

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that as we move on to the new policy, there will be an emphasis on growing more food at home for import substitution, so that these general moneys can lead on to moneys that help us to build a bigger domestic food industry?

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr George Eustice): My right hon. Friend will be aware that we have presented a separate Agriculture Bill, which has had its First Reading. It sets out all the powers we would need to reform agriculture policy. The direct payment regulations before us bring the CAP into UK law and on to the UK statute book, and in the Agriculture Bill, there are powers to modify these regulations, so that we can remove the rough edges and simplify them. There are also powers in the Agriculture Bill to strike a very different course for our agriculture—a course based on payment for public goods, but also on providing farmers with grants to invest in new technology, so that they can improve their profitability or add value to their produce. That Bill also recognises that our food security is vital, and commits the Government to reviewing it every five years. That, however, is obviously a matter that we will debate in the coming weeks and months; I want to return to this direct payments Bill.

Brexit day

At last we leave the EU. It is now quite possible to leave fully at the end of December this year and reap the benefits of Brexit. We can be better off out, and we will restore self government.

It's nineteen months late , and we still stay under their rules and budgets for the rest of this year, so it's not what I wanted or voted for. In the end I accepted the verdict of the election and the new Parliament, as there was no support for just leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement which I thought the better option. The delay has been financially penal, forcing the UK to contribute around £1bn a month for many more months. It has been corrosive of our politics, setting the last Parliament against the people. It undermined trust in many MPs and the Parliament as a whole prior to the election, as so many MPs broke their promises to respect the referendum and help get us out .

Mr Cameron promised he would send the Withdrawal letter promptly after the vote, but failed to do so. Mrs May let Parliament and courts delay our exit letter further. She then promised us an exit in March 2019, with a good deal or with no deal. She too broke her word and kept us in, under pressure from a hostile and broken Parliament.

The new Parliament has a clear majority to leave, and a clear majority that Leave means an exit from the single market and Customs Union as well as from the EU Treaty which we leave this week. That is all very positive. It is important now that the UK government is firm and strong, as well as polite and positive in its dealings with the EU. There must be no sacrifice of our fish, no offers of more money, no acceptance of continuing ECJ jurisdiction. They need a Free Trade Agreement more than we do, and are more likely to grant one if we are firm. The UK has given far too much ground in past negotiations under Mrs May. The new team should table a Free Trade Agreement and explain we do not have to pay to trade.

The world teems with opportunities for us once we are fully out. Today is an important step along that road.

Nationalisation of railway franchises does not solve many of the problems

Yesterday saw the government announce the takeover of the Northern Rail franchise by the government from March. They tell me the aim is to introduce private sector capital and management again on a new basis. They warned against expecting too much from taking over the franchise.

Too many delays, cancelled services and old rolling stock have blighted the service. Many of the problems were entirely outside the control of the franchise holder, and will be no more under the control of the government franchise manager.

The Spanish company supplying new trains failed to meet deadlines for deliveries, forcing the franchise holder to battle on with old stock.

Network Rail, a nationalised business, failed to lengthen platforms in time to allow delivery and use of other new trains.

Some of the delays were caused by Network Rail failures with track and signals.

The franchise holder had problems with the new timetables in 2018 which were required of it from the rail authorities.

Various rail franchises have difficulties in securing Trade Union consent to new ways of working. There is no guarantee the Unions will change their mind over these disputes once they are dealing direct with a government franchise manager.

The bulk of the railway is already nationalised. Many of the delays throughout the network are caused by track or signal failures in the nationalised industry, or in a few cases by people and even vehicles intruding on track or disrupting operation of the system.

Nationalisation is no easy answer, and in the case of Northern it does not suddenly resolve the big issues over train delivery and driver availability that are part of the problem.

The UK needs to improve its supply chain for the many of the new trains the big surge in rail investment will require, and ensure most of the work is carried out in the UK.