

8 things wrong with the Withdrawal Agreement

1. Signing the Withdrawal Agreement gives the EU what they want, taking away most of our bargaining power.
2. The financial commitments are open ended, with some very long lasting. They will doubtless be much more than the Treasury £39 bn forecast. This is money given for nothing in return that we do not legally owe them.
3. We have to accept and follow any law they pass for the next two years or more, without any vote or voice to try to stop laws that damage our interests.
4. We cannot sign any trade deals with other countries all the time we stay in the so called Implementation period.
5. Under the Agreement we might be another 45 months stuck in the EU, making a total of 78 months or six and a half years from our decision to leave. Parliament promised to enact the decision of the People's vote, not to delay it indefinitely.
6. The Irish backstop splits the UK up.
7. The Withdrawal Agreement is legally binding. The Political Declaration is a vague wish list including the contradiction of a possible free trade agreement and a possible customs partnership.
8. Far from ending business uncertainty it prolongs it and makes it worse, as it makes a good outcome for the UK less likely.

This is an unbelievably bad Agreement for the UK and a great one for the EU. It is not a deal, as it does not offer the UK any of the things the PM said she wanted. It is an invitation to much more uncertainty and more talks on worse terms for the UK.

Leaked Letter from Dame Lucy at the unit for co-ordinating Brexit

Readers will remember past leaks from a senior official, Dame Lucy. Another has come to my attention.....

Dear Frank (I'm not sure who he is)

The Prime Minister is rightly pressing on with the Withdrawal Agreement. As you know, the Cabinet Office has been strongly behind this initiative, as it offers us the best chance to protect all that is best about our current membership whilst fulfilling the letter of the remit to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. We have carried out a substantial scoping exercise, and presented Ministers with the enormity of the task, reflecting all the inherent

agreements and arrangements that have arisen from 45 years of membership of the EEC/EU. We have also responded to those Ministers who have said they are looking for a compromise between Remain and Leave, and wish to reflect the Opposition position that there must be no damage to jobs and trade. Some Ministers as at the Treasury and Business recognise that it will take a lot of time to try to get these features of our current membership into any future partnership agreement, though they would like to do so.

The truth is there has been no Agreement on offer which duplicates our membership of the Customs Union and single market which also meets the requirements to exit freedom of movement and to leave the EU. Because of this we worked with the EU on the sequencing proposal. Now it is established that the UK has to sign up to the money and a number of important obligations up front to reassure the EU, we can proceed to highlight the possible addition of better trading terms and some agreement on customs once the Withdrawal Agreement is signed. As you can see from the WA we have allowed plenty of time, with 21 months to be followed by up to a further 2 years. This means of course there could be one or more General elections before the negotiations are finished. The Opposition policy of wanting to stay in the Customs Union and single market would not be pre-empted before at least one General election had occurred, which might be best in the circumstances, assuming we need all the time laid down to try to sort out a future partnership. Meanwhile, though we have technically left, all obligations and legal arrangements remain the same.

There is concern in the Unit that the WA might not get through the Commons. We have briefed Ministers to stress there might be no Brexit without the WA, and to highlight the uncertainties rejecting the WA will create. We need to help them respond to those who argue that just leaving and trading under WTO terms is a true Brexit. The government has successfully stressed that such a Brexit would be "hard" and like falling off a cliff. We may need to send out more of the material from the scoping survey showing just how many things might change, and how they might change for the worse without the continuity provided by the WA. I understand there are a few large multinationals prepared to forecast problems for supply chains and transport which we must give prominence to. The government is very preoccupied by the Union, so it is good that the EU stresses the significance of the Irish border issues.

This current fluid situation leaves open the danger of just leaving by default. That is why we must draw attention to the risks, and help Ministers stress the advantages of staying in and spending more time trying to get the future partnership right. In practice once we have signed the WA our bargaining position is much reduced, so we also need in private with Ministers to lower expectations of what can be achieved in subsequent negotiations. Treasury and Business seem aware of this, but some other departments are less well informed. We need to ensure the Trade department does not raise hopes of any early breakthrough for a Free Trade Agreement with the USA or some other non EU state, as that would be seen as provocative on the continent. We also need to ready departments for the rush of new EU legislation likely to come from the new Parliament and Commission, which we must implement thoroughly in our usual way.

Yours

Lucy

[Union Jack and the beanstalk on video](#)

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– Bow Group (@bowgroup) [December 25, 2018](#)

[Happy Christmas](#)

(Here's one I prepared earlier)

WILL SANTA COME TONIGHT?

"Will Santa come? Will Santa come tonight?"

"He might. He might.

If you are good, he might."

"Can I stay up and see?"

"No. He will not come for you or me

If we do not sleep .

He's too busy to meet us all."

"And will he come for us?

If you go to sleep – he does not like fuss."

Tonight, by the lights of the tree
There is, at last, some grown up time for me.
The cake is iced
The wine is spiced
The carrots diced.

The pudding's steamed
The brandy butter creamed.
The turkey prepared awaits
And yes, I did clean the plates.
The tree is up, the table laid,
the cards are out , though the bills unpaid!

So shall I soon with gifts a plenty
Mount the stairs to deliver twenty?
Do I dare to tread the stair?
And will it creak?
And will it creak?
When can I take a peek?
I need to know if they slumber
Before I arrive with my lumber.

If they are still awake
what dreams will go?
What heart might break?
Or do they know?
And is their belief just all for show?

So tonight by the magic tree
There is need of more time just for me
I will wait – and struggle to keep open my eyes
And wrestle with the morality of eating Santa's mince pies.

My adult mind is full of Christmas chores
The cooking times, and the cards through neighbours' doors
The parties where you cannot drink and go home by car
As that would be pushing Christmas luck too far
Drinks that might have been – but not that cheap red
Which would give me a headache as soon as I got to bed

I was once a child too excited to sleep
with a torrent of thoughts about what I might be given
Hoping that it was a toy beneath the wrapping – should I peep? –
Not more socks or hankies, preferably something to be driven

So could Santa still come for me?
Drowsily I dream as if I were eight
Hoping that Santa would not be late
Like every little boy
There is of course a much wanted toy

So will Santa come tonight?
He might, He might.
If you sleep well
and if you believe

Only if you believe.

And only if in your family

Love fills the hours you will be spending.

It could be the true Santa on the stair

Or it could be someone from an empty chair.

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So will Santa come?

He will. He will.

Ending rough sleeping

The government has announced its wish to make big inroads into rough sleeping with a view in due course to eliminating it. I am sure all agree that would be a welcome development, as no-one likes to see people out in the cold and wet trying to shelter in a doorway or under an arch as the rest of the world scurries by. We ought to be able to help more of them to a better life.

The latest proposal from the government is an initiative called "Somewhere safe to stay". Anyone seen out at night will be offered a place in a refuge, where there would also be assessment made of their needs and how they might be helped into a more normal life with a job and a tenancy for a roof over their heads. Where people need medical attention or help with getting off drink or drugs, that too could be sorted out.

This is a development of the rapid assessment hubs currently used for the "No second night out" approach. It is important that there is a place where the homeless can be directed where they can receive immediate assistance and the longer term help they may require. The government runs a system of supported lettings and works with local agencies to try to find accommodation for an individual and the means to pay for it. In the high stress parts of the country overnight accommodation is available and people go out and tell the homeless of what is available.

There is in place a network of hostels and assistance from benefits offices and Housing departments. People out on the streets should be offered these facilities, as good Councils seek to do. People sleeping out cannot be compelled to take up offers made.