

Beware the draft Withdrawal Agreement

It is difficult to see why some in government are so keen for us to complete negotiating a Withdrawal Agreement. The one the EU has in mind is a one sided grab of powers and money. Some in government seem to think we need another 21 months in limbo, technically out of the EU but in practice bound into it by a new Withdrawal Treaty on more penal terms than our current membership. What is they can agree after March 2019 that they have been unable to agree in the 2 years nine months from the vote until next March? Why not just get on with it with March 2019 as the deadline?

Mr Raab has tried to inject some negotiating counter into the proceedings by saying there needs to be a Future Relationship Agreement to justify this very generous Withdrawal Agreement for the EU. The problem is the UK civil service seem to accept that the Future Relationship Agreement will be a flimsy Head of Terms, effectively little more than an invitation to another 21 months of probably unfriendly and fruitless negotiations. Meanwhile the EU is understandably keen to get the UK to sign the Withdrawal Agreement in solemn Treaty form, so we are bound in and have to make the payments.

I have seen nothing so far on offer from the EU by way of a future relationship that justifies paying them another £39bn after we have left. Canada did not pay them for their FTA, so why do we need to pay them for something similar, if that turns out to be their best offer in the end? Nor do I like the idea that any future partnership would take the form of a complex and binding Association Agreement. These are used to impose EU rules and practices on states that would like to become members in due course.

The more I look at the UK economy and public services, the more important it seems to me that we have that money back soon. Then we can pull off what is needed for greater prosperity – tax cuts, spending increases and a fall in deficit.