

Negotiating our way out of the EU?

In the muddle of the tv debate yesterday there were three positions advanced on how to get out of the EU, and effectively three positions on when to get out.

Mr Stewart argued that Parliament had to pass the Withdrawal treaty it has thrice rejected. That looks very unlikely. In default of that he invented all sorts of new processes which would entail a long delay in exit. His further consultation with the public might well be designed to move towards a second referendum or some other way to stop Brexit altogether.

Messrs Hunt, Javid and Gove argued there had to be a renegotiation, with efforts at least to remove the backstop from the current Withdrawal treaty. It is difficult to believe any of this. The EU has made clear they do not intend to re open the Withdrawal Treaty issues. Changing the Political declaration would not change the backstop or any of the other bad features of the draft Treaty. There is no obvious authority to negotiate with before the new Commission is formed. It seems impossible for a new PM to engage in talks, get meaningful changes to the Treaty and put it through Parliament before October 31. Two of the three countenanced a short delay to get an agreement, with Mr Gove favouring a delay until end December 2019.

Mr Johnson insisted on exit on 31 October. He has in mind offering a free trade deal to the EU. If they will agree to talks on such a proposition then the UK need not impose any new tariffs on them as we leave, nor them on us. Under GATT 24 there would be ample time to discuss the Free Trade Agreement whilst continuing to trade without tariffs whilst doing so. If the EU refuses to discuss a Free Trade Agreement then we leave without a deal and impose the same tariffs on the EU as we impose on everyone else. They do the same to us. The EU has always said they are interested in a free trade agreement but it has to be negotiated after we have left.