

Simple negotiating

I am glad the government is going full ahead with showing how the WTO option can work for the UK, and will do what it takes to make sure we trade and do business after March 2019 if there is no deal. That is a sensible contingency plan, as well as a good negotiating strategy.

It is quite clear from the different tone of remarks coming from Mrs Merkel, the Commission and elsewhere within the EU that they are very worried at just how popular the WTO model is with many UK voters. Brexit voters understand that this model delivers us full control over all our money from March 2019 with no additional payments, full control over all our laws including the laws transferred from the EU with the end of all ECJ jurisdiction, and full national control of our borders from day one out of the EU. That is what we wanted from Brexit. That is what "taking back control" was all about.

The wider partnership agreement that the UK wants mainly revolves around adding a free trade agreement to that list of advantages from simple exit. The debate is going to be over how much damage should we allow to the many advantages of just leaving in order to secure that free trade agreement. Some seem to think it is worth billions in extra payments, and worth keeping some ECJ involvement. I don't agree.

I suggest the government starts from a different perspective. It should remind the EU that a deal will only be acceptable if it is indeed better than the WTO "no deal" option. That does not leave scope for giving money away we do not owe, or for accepting continuing EU jurisdiction. So first secure the WTO choice, then I suspect the EU will be more willing to seek tariff free trade which we know it wants. We do not need to pay to trade, especially when it is much more import than export. We certainly do not need to pay for talks.

Some say we do need a transition period after we have left. There is sufficient time to put in place all that is needed to conduct our EU trade on the same basis as we currently conduct our non EU trade under WTO rules before we leave. That should be the government's overriding practical aim for the next seventeen months. We will only need some implementation period beyond March 2019 if we have an Agreement reached late in the negotiations that requires something different from WTO border arrangements.

I am receiving numerous messages to get on with Brexit and keep to the March 2019 deadline to leave.