

# Brexit roundup – short-term problems; longer-term potential?

With Parliament still in the Easter recess, things have been a bit quieter than usual on the Brexit front. However, the well-supported fishing protests last Sunday suggest that we are going to be entering a period in which the Government will face ever-mounting pressure to try a different approach to securing some sort of workable short-term post Brexit arrangement.

The long term is not looking promising either. Given how readily Mrs May and David Davis rolled over, what is the likelihood of their resisting demands from Michel Barnier that the UK sign a “non-regression” clause in any long-term agreement, which would force the UK not to undercut EU standards on tax, health and the environment to poach investments. He has also insisted that access for EU fishing vessels must be included in any long-term deal. The “environment” issue is a red herring as many EU environmental laws owe their existence to UK influence, but why should we not determine who fishes in our waters? Why should we be denied the freedom to cut tax? The state in the UK is horrifically bloated, as in most other Western nations. It needs to be shrunk drastically and were this to be undertaken, taxes would inevitably undercut those in many EU member states.

Going back to the transitional arrangements, a report from the House of Commons Brexit Committee has confirmed that if a “deep and special partnership” with the EU proved unsuccessful, EEA/Efta membership was an alternative that could be implemented quickly. Although the Committee is looking at EEA/Efta as a long-term solution (which it isn't)

it would be a better alternative than the current proposals for the short term, which poses the question as to why Mrs May and her team are pursuing such a damaging alternative. Maybe they still believe that it's worth enduring 21 months of humiliation because there will be a marvellous deal at the end – a hope which is unlikely to be fulfilled. Barnier's comments make it clear that he wants to deny us as much long-term freedom as possible.

A number of Commonwealth countries have been discussing a future trade relationship with the EU. The Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that it would be "fairly easy" to negotiate "an improved approach on trade between Canada and the UK" after Brexit. The same article claimed that India is becoming less enthusiastic, no doubt due to the recent statement by Theresa May that she still intended to reduce annual net UK migration to less than 100,000, meaning that India's desire for more of its citizens to come over here as part of a new trade deal is unlikely to be fulfilled. Australia is also keen to start negotiations with the UK on trade, but pointed out that if we stayed in the EU's customs union after Brexit, we would become "irrelevant".

Meanwhile, disgruntled remoaners are still seeking to overturn Brexit by demanding a second referendum. For all her failings in other areas of Brexit, at least Mrs May is standing firm on this. "Regardless of whether they backed Leave or Remain, most people are tired of hearing the same old divisive arguments from the referendum campaign, and just want us to get on with the task of making Brexit a success. And they're right to think that. The people of this country voted to leave the EU and, as Prime Minister, it's my job to make that happen." she said in a recent speech to mark one year until Brexit day.

Mrs May is most definitely right in claiming that most people have had enough of Brexit controversy. Claims that some 44% of voters want a second referendum do not tally with real-life

experience. Given that the poll was conducted by a pro-remain group, *Best for Britain*, a healthy degree of scepticism is justified. Mrs May has the support of Jeremy Corbyn in opposing a second referendum and it is doubtful whether those activists on both sides of the argument who spoke in debate after debate, criss-crossing the country and having to suspend anything resembling a normal life for three months would want to go through it again.

The clamour is coming from those who wouldn't have to do the donkey work. The latest addition to the ranks of these good-for nothings is David Miliband, who called Brexit "the humiliation of Britain." Well, Mrs May does seem to be trying to do this at the moment, but a decent Brexit would be the absolute opposite – a chance to stand tall as a sovereign nation once again. there's nothing humiliating about this. One after another, the fears stoked up by remoaners are being debunked. The UK economy has performed well since the vote and only today, Andreas Dombret, Member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank, stated that despite attempts to lure parts of the finance industry to Paris or Frankfurt, London would remain Europe's financial hub after Brexit. A mass exodus from the City was always a concern during the referendum campaign, but such fears are unfounded.

In many ways, a healthy debate on **how** we leave – i.e., the relative merits of the current transitional proposal versus EEA/Efta as a holding position will take the wind out of the remoaners' sails and would cut their media exposure in favour of more important issues. However, one cannot overstate the importance of winning this debate. Brexit must mean Brexit (to quote Mrs May). Surrendering to the EU's demands for a transitional deal would prevent us fully achieving the separation for which we voted in June 2016. This must not happen.