

Brexit: what we want and what we might get

The last week has seen the publication of a number of position papers by the Department for Exiting the European Union, covering issues ranging from trade and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice through to the Irish border. You will find articles which review each position paper on the website.

Of course, what the UK government wants and what the EU will agree to may not be the same thing. Indeed, at least one commentator is claiming that the position papers do not yet reflect a final government position but are but one side of “an internal debate within the Conservative Party.”

But what do UK voters want from Brexit? A survey by the London School of Economics and Oxford University asked more than 3,000 people for their thoughts – including both leave and remain voters.

The most interesting finding is the unity between remain and leave voters on a number of issues. Barely one third of those surveyed are keen on single market membership, ongoing EU payments, free movement and the jurisdiction of the ECJ once we leave. Significantly, this majority includes a number of remain voters.

Although there is widespread support for a free trade agreement with the EU (88%), 69% want customs checks introduced at the borders – some what contradictory stances!

What is more significant is that this survey offers little support for hard-core remoaners and remainiacs who wish to stall Brexit. The referendum is now behind us; the majority of the population has accepted the result and wants to see the government make the most of the opportunity leaving the EU

provides.

What sort of deal we will get, of course, is another issue. Analysis of the position papers published so far do not give us any sort of detail about how deals on many areas are going to be concluded. We have seen what amounts to a UK wish list which the EU may well decide to refuse.

Still, amidst all the concerns about the lack of progress by the Department for Exiting the European Union, one good piece of news appeared today. Net migration (immigrants minus emigrants) has fallen by 81,000 from 327,000 to 246,000 in the year to March. The number of EU nationals coming to the UK fell while over 33,000 more additional EU nationals left the country, including an extra 17,000 from the so-called EU8, the former Soviet bloc countries who joined the EU in 2004. 246,000 immigrants still equates to a city the size of Hull or Plymouth and is well above the Conservatives' net migration target of under 100,000. This drop is nonetheless welcome. Many individual factors no doubt contributed to it, but Brexit would indisputably have been one of the reasons. Given that one of the reasons for the Brexit vote was a desire to end free movement and thus bring immigration down, it is encouraging to see that it has already had a benign effect – and without the Government even doing anything!

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