

Preparing for Brexit – a letter from our Chairman

Sir,

It is one of the very few advantages of getting older that you can remember things which others either do not know, have forgotten, or wish had been forgotten.

When we joined the EEC on 1 January 1973, our animal feed mill entered a completely new way of doing business. We were prepared because the government gave very full, detailed information starting from late in 1971. Whilst the new system was complicated, bureaucratic and alien, we were able to continue earning our living smoothly because we knew what to do and had been given adequate time to prepare.

So I heartily endorse Heather Wheeler's point ("Focus is now on getting best trade deal" 15 December) that firms will need similar guidance and time to adapt to all the new procedures which will be required when we become what is called a "Third Country" outside the EU.

The detail required is tremendous and advance notice to business essential. Our successful chemical industry is in the middle of a lengthy period of adaptation to the existing EU REACH Regulations which require all chemicals to be registered with the EU for health and safety purposes. So, back in March the government assured the industry that there would be an identical British scheme. Not only has there been no progress but the EU has indicated that only its own scheme will be acceptable and that is only available to firms established within the EU. So British chemical manufacturers are having to set up EU subsidiaries to avoid being excluded from their important EU market.

Similarly, the airline Easyjet, presently a British company,

plans to move its headquarters to mainland Europe and alter its articles of association so that a majority of shareholders must always be EU companies or individuals – not British. That way, it will be able to stay flying between the 27 other EU countries, if the UK is unable to conclude an agreement with the EU before Brexit to continue present aviation arrangements.

On a more homely note, sheep farmers need to know immediately whether to breed from their youngest ewes or to fatten them for slaughter. Forty per cent of British lamb goes to the EU. If we are outside with no agreement on Brexit day, 29 March 2019, there will be a tariff of as much as £2689 per tonne. Lamb would be would be unprofitable. Not only that, coming from a "Third Country", British lamb would face sanitary inspection at the border before being allowed near EU customs.

It is, of course, a British tradition to conceal a sharp intellect and selfless, unsparing, industrious dedication to duty behind an appearance of languid amateurism. In a recent interview, David Davis said "I don't have to be very clever. I don't have to know very much". Taken with his performance to date, one has to admit that it is a singularly effective disguise. At least, we must hope so!

Yours faithfully,

Edward Spalton