

# What Remainers are saying now and getting their facts wrong

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## Written by Robert Tombs

A debate against Stella Creasy and Dominic Grieve. Last Thursday I took part in a debate in London organised by Intelligence Squared. The title was 'Were we right to Brexit?' Arguing that we were indeed right were Lord (Daniel) Hannan and myself. On the other side were the rising Labour MP Stella Creasy, and the leading Remainer and former rebel Conservative MP, Dominic Grieve. Of particular interest to me was to learn what Remainers, or former Remainers, now think and say, and what evidence they can produce for their claims. Any who may wish to see the whole recorded debate will find it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-fVMIUHmwE>

Both Dominic Grieve and Stella Creasy, unsurprisingly, insisted that Brexit had been a disaster. Though Lord Hannan and I pointed out that none of the apocalyptic predictions made by the Remain campaign (including David Cameron, George Osborne, the CBI, The Treasury ...) had actually happened, our opponents still insisted that we had taken a huge economic 'hit'.

Much of their argument was very familiar from media reports over the years. That the City of London had supposedly 'lost 7,000 jobs' – a tiny proportion of the vast exodus predicted. And, in fact, almost balanced by 5,400 new City jobs supposedly created by Brexit. Large international banks,

indeed, have increased their London staffing.

### Sources:

- [https://www.ey.com/en\\_uk/news/2022/03/ey-financial-services-brexit-tracker-movement-within-uk-financial-services-sector-stabilises-five-years-on-from-article-50-trigger](https://www.ey.com/en_uk/news/2022/03/ey-financial-services-brexit-tracker-movement-within-uk-financial-services-sector-stabilises-five-years-on-from-article-50-trigger)
- <https://www.ft.com/content/0c7c2597-4afd-4ade-bc19-02c3bbc53daf>

Mr Grieve also insisted that we had become politically isolated, despite our pointing to the leadership Britain has so evidently shown over the Ukraine crisis. Both he and Ms Creasy argued that we would have more ‘influence’ if we were ‘inside the room’ with the ‘other 27’ EU members. Influence to do what was unclear, for there was no suggestion that the EU had been effective or united in its response to Russian aggression. ‘Inside the room’ our influence would have been stifled, not enhanced.

Lord Hannan and I both tried to provoke some discussion of the EU’s flaws and its problems. As we pointed out, being in the EU was far from being a risk-free option, given its political, economic and financial troubles. I referred to its fundamentally undemocratic nature and the corruption of those running it (the head of the European Central Bank convicted of complicity in misuse of huge public funds, the president of the Commission found to have plagiarized her doctoral thesis, and so on). He made the point that the EU was constantly in flux: what did staying in mean?

Our opponents did not attempt to defend the EU. Indeed, they hardly talked about it at all. Brexiteers have often noticed that reluctance to discuss the EU is a common feature of Remainer discourse. Their devotion to ‘Europe’ is left at a cloudy level of abstraction. Alternatively, they focus on the trivial: Stella Creasy praised the EU for aiming to ensure

that there was only one kind of mobile phone charging cable.

Perhaps inevitably, most of the debate was about the economic consequences of Brexit. Our opponents kept insisting on the 'hit' we had supposedly taken, and backed this up with reference to the cost of living crisis, labour shortages, and economic growth rates, all of which they claimed were disastrous and of course all a result of Brexit. When we pointed out that economic growth since 2016 had been practically the same in the UK and the EU, that inflation too was virtually the same (and food price inflation lower in the UK), and that labour shortages were being felt across the EU and beyond, this was disputed. Brexit *had* to be a failure: no other possibility was conceivable. Even when Lord Hannan quickly looked up the latest official figures from the Office of National Statistics on his phone, they were disputed. Galileo had a similar problem with the Inquisition.

It is tedious when debate comes down to a battle of rival statistics. Nevertheless, it is sometimes necessary to look seriously at these, as so much of the Brexit debate over more than six years has depended on 'Project Fear'. It is still very much alive and kicking: 'the data is very very clear,' insisted Stella Creasy, 'we have taken an economic hit.'

She disputed my figures, and suggested that as an academic I should be more scrupulous in checking them. In reply, I offered to place the sources of my data on the Intelligence Squared website, and challenged her to do the same. It turns out that Intelligence Squared cannot do this, but of course Briefings for Britain can. My key statistics and sources are listed below, and I have invited Stella Creasy to send hers so that we can post them, and our readers can judge. So far she has not replied, but if she does, we will post her response.

One final observation. Dominic Grieve said that 'ultimately we could rejoin the EU', though this was 'not for tomorrow'. Rejoiners by definition take this view, even if it means

reigniting the conflicts of the last six years. Stella Creasy, in contrast, distanced herself from this position, saying that there was no question of rejoining—the standard Labour line at present. But nevertheless, she too insists that Brexit is a disaster. Where is the logic? Why stick with a disaster? Because, as she implied, her priority is to brand Brexit as a failure in order to discredit Boris Johnson and the Brexiteers. As ‘getting Brexit done’ got the government into office, if the country can be persuaded that Brexit is bad (and this constant refrain seems indeed to be having some effect) it might get the government out of office—without Labour having openly to espouse the highly risky course of rejoining the EU. This too seems very frank on her part: her strategy is party political. One can hardly object, since she is a politician. But it cannot be doubted that a Labour government would do its utmost to reverse Brexit surreptitiously, by attempting to rejoin the customs union and the single market, which would leave us in a worse position than in 2016.

Whether her position or that hinted at by Dominic Grieve is the more sterile and damaging readers may decide. But damaging they are, and doubly so if their argument is based on false information. People in prominent positions have a clear duty to be careful of their facts, and not to recklessly throw around misleading claims. Especially if those claims serve to perpetuate the damaging divisions of the last few years, and aim to reverse the slow and painful process towards restoring national democracy that we have fought for since 2016. Having only one kind of phone cable will not be much consolation.

So here are my statistics and their sources. I have invited Ms Creasy to send hers.

## **Remainers say Brexit has caused an economic 'hit'. Has it really?**

### ***"Economic growth is lower due to Brexit"***

**GDP growth has been higher in Britain** than in the Eurozone since we left: in 2021 by 7.4% to 5.3%; and it is predicted by the IMF to be higher in 2022 (3.7% to 2.8%). If in 2023 it is lower (1.2% to 2.3%) than in the Eurozone—the one IMF forecast that Remainers are eagerly highlighting—this is because the Eurozone is belatedly catching up. Yet so far, the UK continues to outperform the EU: British GDP growth in the first quarter of 2022 was **more than double** that of the EU (0.75% to 0.27%).

**Sources: International Monetary Fund [IMF], Office for National Statistics [ONS], eurostat**

In the wider global context too, UK growth remained above average: in 2021, it was 7.4%, compared with the average in all advanced economies of 5.2%. The IMF forecasts that UK growth this year will be 3.7%, compared with the advanced economies average of 3.3%.

**Source:**

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WE0/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>

### ***"The cost of living has risen due to Brexit"***

**Food prices** (April 2021-April 2022) rose 6.5% in the UK, and 9.2% in the Eurozone.

**Sources: Eurostat, ONS**

**Prices of all UK imports** from the EU showed no hike in the months following our exit from the Single Market. Since 2021, they have indeed risen: from March 2021 to March 2022 they

rose 13%. But in the Eurozone, import prices have risen by nearly twice as much over the same period—by 25%.

**Sources: ONS and Eurostat**

Industrial producer prices are presently increasing **in the EU at double the rate** of the UK

**Sources: Eurostat, ONS**

**Clearly, price rises in the UK cannot be blamed on Brexit when prices in the EU are rising as fast and often faster.**

### ***“Trade has collapsed due to Brexit”***

There has been a slight fall in our trade with the EU, but much of the decline is in export of North Sea Oil, because we are producing less, partly by choice. Exports of other goods, however, have not shown a fall, and from January 2020 to May 2022, eurostar freight volumes rose by 5%.

**Sources: Sources: ONS and Getlink**

If we take as an example trade with France, British exports between 2016 and 2020 followed a practically identical course with those of German exports to France; and since the end of 2020, British exports to France have significantly outpaced those of Germany. **Source: Direction Générale des Douânes et des Droits indirects**

**Financial services** exports—one of our major industries—have remained stable with the EU: in the last three months of 2021 they amounted to £6 billion—the same as for the same period in 2019, before Covid and when we were still in the Single Market. But our financial services exports **worldwide rose** over the same period from £13.6 billion to £14.8 billion.

**Source: ONS**

**In general, over the last decade our trade has been rising six times faster with the rest of the world than with the Eurozone.**

### ***“Labour shortages are due to Brexit”***

There are labour shortages round the globe—a consequence of the disruption caused by Covid. The Bank of France, for example, announced on 13 March that half of all French firms are suffering from recruiting problems. **Source: *Le Monde*, 21 March 2022.**

In Britain, the shortage cannot be blamed on Brexit, because the number of EU-born individuals in employment fell by only 20,000 between 2019 and 2022—disproving stories of a mass exodus. Also, over the same period, people from the rest of the world with jobs in the UK rose by 440,000.

#### **Source:**

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbycountryofbirthandnationalityemp06>

### ***“Brexit-induced border bureaucracy has raised prices in the UK and devastated our export trade with the EU”***

Exporters of food and beverages faced arguably the largest new barriers of any sector post-Brexit, and very pessimistic predictions were made by Remainers about their future. What has actually happened?

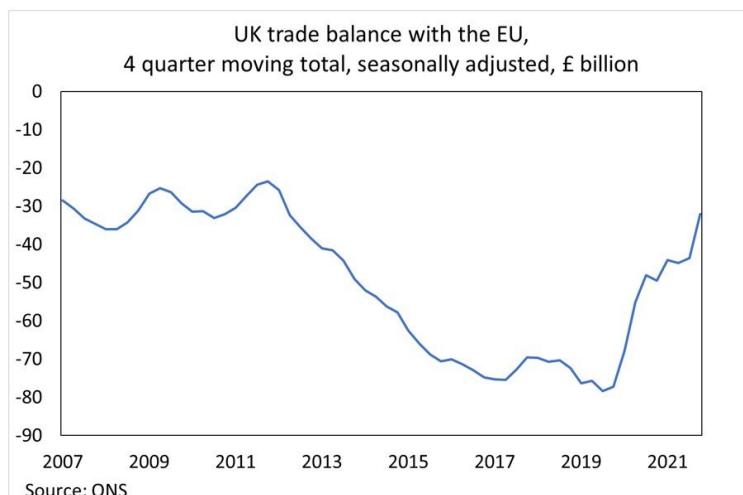
Our **fishing exports** to the EU—around £100 million per month—are little changed from 2014, long before Brexit. Other food exports are slightly up, and beverages exports in April 2022 (worth £257 million) were **10.5% higher** than at the start of 2020. Scottish salmon exports—widely predicted by Remainers

to be doomed by Brexit—are booming: **up by a nearly a third last year to the EU, and by 36% to global markets**, confirming salmon’s place as the UK’s biggest single food export.

**Sources :**

**ONS;**

<https://dailybusinessgroup.co.uk/2022/02/scottish-salmon-exports-to-eu-surge-29/>



**Our net trading position with the EU—i.e. imports compared with exports—has substantially *improved* since we left the Single Market.** Though we still have a large trade deficit, it has more than halved, by the equivalent of 2% of GDP (in monetary terms, over £40 billion)

**Source: ONS**

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