

A reminder of why we voted to leave

It was perhaps a bit premature to suggest that CETA, the EU-Canada Free Trade agreement was dead in the water. Less than a week ago, it appeared to be on the rocks due to strong opposition from Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium. Only a few days later, the Walloons seem to have decided the deal is not so bad after all, enabling the Belgian Federal Government to add its signature to those of the other 27 EU member states.

According to the *EU Observer*, the change in heart took place after “intensive talks” in Brussels. In other words, intense pressure was put on the Walloons to change their minds. Have any concessions been made? The article stated that “Belgian prime minister Charles Michel said that Thursday’s talks had calmed “outstanding concerns” and that “Belgium will ask the European Court of Justice to clarify the proposed investment court system, which was one of the most controversial elements of the trade deal.”

These developments ought to serve as a reminder as to why we voted to leave the EU. One party, perhaps a member state, objects to some new EU deal. Maybe, as in the case of the Dutch and French referendums on the failed EU constitution, they reject it outright. Somehow, the deal never dies. It’s all about fudge, compromise or naked pressure; keeping the moaners under control. Rejection by parliaments or the wider electorate is only ever seen as a short-term setback. If the EU wants something to go ahead, go ahead it will – eventually.

Over four months on from the referendum and hot on the heels of news that two challenges to Brexit have been thrown out by the High Court in Belfast, it’s time for another huge sigh of relief that we will be saying goodbye to all this, hopefully

by April 2019.

Of course, we still have not been told anything much about the proposed shape of our post-Brexit relationship with the EU, but some people have clearly been taken into the Government's confidence. Nissan's Chief Executive, Mr Ghosn, who announced only last week that its next-generation QashQai and the new X-Trail models will be built in its Sunderland factory, has obviously been assured that the company will enjoy continued favourable access to the EU Single Market under the government's plans. People who have worked with Mrs. May remark that she has a voracious appetite for detail and is extremely cautious before committing herself. Anyone who read her Conservative Party Conference speech (as opposed to reading the rather silly headlines about it) will know that she left herself plenty of wriggle room as to our future relationship with the EU.

Of course, Labour has demanded to know what guarantees of taxpayers' money she has made. But anyone who has studied the EU for half an hour will know that state aid is contrary to EU rules. Mr. Corbyn has only been in Parliament for rather more than three decades, so he still needs time to absorb this fact. Not only that, the rules of the "World Trade Organisation Option", so favoured by advocates of "Hard Brexit", also impose swingeing penalties for such anti-competitive activity. So it is most unlikely that any such guarantee has been given.

All in all, with the UK economy confounding expectations and growing by 0.5% in the three months following the Brexit vote and exporters feeling more confident falling the fall in sterling, the scaremongering of Project Fear is looking more and more ridiculous. As time progresses, it will become increasingly apparent just what a good thing it was to vote to leave the EU.