

The Customs Union – stupidity or sabotage?

Regular readers of this blog will know without a shadow of doubt that there is nothing to be gained by remaining in the EU's Customs Union. Well, dear readers, you can pat yourselves on the back for you are clearly much wiser than 348 members of the Upper Chamber of our Parliament.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard, speaking in the debate preceding the vote, said "I do not recall at the time of the referendum any debate about a customs union." He was perfectly correct in saying this. Staying in the customs union is such a daft idea that no one felt the need to bring the subject up. As Dr Richard North points out, "A customs union does not in any way eliminate a border, as we see with the borders between Turkey and EU Member States." it is therefore no help in solving the Irish border question.

He also makes the point that, as usual, the Press are all over the place in their reporting of yesterday's vote. It was not a "big defeat" for the government as the amendment supported by 348 peers only forced "the government to explain what it has done to pursue remaining in a customs union". In other words, suppose that some degree of light finally dawned and the government realised that there was no point in remaining in a customs union, all this "big defeat" would require them to do would be to say to their Lordships "not much". Hardly the sabotaging of Brexit which the headlines seem to suggest.

For people looking for a way to keep the flow of trade moving in the immediate post-Brexit period, both across the Irish border and through the Channel Tunnel, it makes for more sense to visit the invisible border between Sweden and Norway rather than Turkey's version of "Operation Stack" at Kapikule on its border with EU member state Bulgaria. Norway is not in the

customs union; Turkey is. Need one say any more?

The Government should finally lay to rest all this nonsense about a customs union. It should also abandon the current plans for a transitional deal. Further evidence of its inadequacies emerged yesterday when Cecilia Malmström, the EU's trade commissioner, said that the UK would no longer be part of trade agreements negotiated by the EU with third countries once we leave. Re-joining EFTA as an interim arrangement would not only solve the Irish border issue but would address the issue of our trade with countries like South Korea and Mexico as EFTA has negotiated free trade agreements with virtually all the countries with which the EU has FTAs.

It remains a mystery to many observers why this sensible option isn't being pursued. For all its well-known faults as a long-term relationship, as a stopgap arrangement it is far better than the arrangement currently being discussed with the EU. Adopting it would put to bed a number of issues which should have been dealt with well before now and thus enable the Brexit debate to move on after being stuck in the same groove for far too long