

The Brexit myths

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It would seem from comments received here, on Twitter, and rather more generally that those seeking Brexit do so from within some sort of bubble.

The impression they give is that Brexit wipes a slate clean and that forty three years of legal, economic and social history will be swept away and some new era where all is open to negotiation for what those advocate Brexit clearly still believe to be one of the greatest independent trading nations on earth will emerge.

This is fantasy. More bluntly, it is untrue. And to suggest it as the basis for decision making is deeply irresponsible.

I [have made clear](#) that I believe that there are serious weaknesses inherent in the structure, let alone the practice, of the EU. Anyone, anywhere on the social, economic or political spectrum would, I am sure, want reform of something in the EU. But, that said, there is no magic wand. Within or without the EU what has been done is extant, and wishing it otherwise will not change it.

In other words, whoever wins this referendum, the starting point for reform is, effectively the same. And the scope for negotiation may also be limited: Brexit will not (except, perhaps, in the imaginations of Farage and Galloway) result in the UK just turning its back on Europe. It will instead mean negotiating a new relationship with it.

If that new relationship is to be based on tariff free trade - and the UK is heavily dependent on that at present - then in a negotiation of 27 embittered nations against one it can fairly be presumed that remarkably little ground will be given. If the UK wishes in that case to avoid tariffs and other practical obstacles to trading it will, no doubt have to agree to comply with EU trade standards, the free movement of capital, the free movement of people, EU VAT rules and many, if not most, of EU working standards.

The list could be more detailed: what I am saying is that EU regulation would need to apply for tariff free trade to take place. In other words, nothing would change from

where we are now unless we were willing to suffer considerable cost in the form of barriers to trade. Nor would we save admin cost post Brexit either: the precedents suggest that having access to EU markets requires a contribution to the EU's cost of maintaining them. In that case contributions to the EU will also continue.

This is the reality of Brexit. It is that a very great deal of the relationship with Europe will not change at all. To pretend otherwise is to peddle a myth.

But it is worth noting what might change.

It is likely that some vital protections for employees will be relaxed.

The probability is that the UK will behave even more like a tax haven than now.

As a result is is very likely that inequality will rise.

New trade deals, negotiated from a position of weakness with countries like the USA, are very likely to require the irreversible privatisation of public services, including the NHS.

Freedom of speech, [already deeply imperilled](#), is likely to be reduced still further. The right to oppose will be diminished in every walk of life.

There will be labour shortages in critical areas.

We will have a flood of returning pensioners from abroad, putting the NHS under strain.

The cost of imports will rise. Our exports will earn less.

It is not a pretty picture.

And my fear is that these realities will not be reflected in debates. Which is deeply worrying.