

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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JACOB REES-MOGG

AM: Can I ask you about this letter that you have signed? This letter that you have signed going to the prime minister. Now, one of the things it says is that not a penny must be paid to the EU unless we have a full trade agreement with no tariffs agreed by March 2018. Is that a misprint?

JRM: It's very important that we – yes, it's March 2019 really, it has to be agreed, not March 2018. Yes, so no, obviously. But it's very important that we don't hand over a great deal of money unless we have an agreement. The risk is that we pay the money from the day we leave and that reduces our negotiating clout to get a trade deal finalised, if it hasn't been done before 29th March 2019. And that seems an obvious point.

AM: And you want the transition period, which is basically there to help British business, to mean that we could carry on, we can actually start to do free trade deals with the rest of the world and that we have no European Court of Justice jurisdiction whatsoever during those two years?

JRM: Well, the question is whether we remain in the European Union for an extra period to have the transition or whether we've left on 29th March 2019. If we remain under the European Court of Justice and we're making large obligatory payments to the EU budget, there is no difference on 30th March than the 29th March, and we will have stayed in the European Union. So it's a question of whether we've actually left in 2019 or are de facto remaining in the European Union but without any votes or without a judge or without any of the current protections that we have, poor though they are.

AM: Can I be clear, under your plan, as it were, because there's also no freedom of movement after March 2019, in effect there is

no transitional period at all, it's happened. March 2019, no freedom of move, no ECJ, no money, we're out and that's it?

JRM: You describe it beautifully. We will actually have left in March 2019.

AM: So there isn't a transition period?

JRM: The Prime Minister used to refer carefully – just a moment – the Prime Minister used to refer very carefully to an implementation period. And that meant that we had left in 2019, but were implementing the consequences of leaving. Now everyone seems to be talking about transition, which means transitioning from in the European Union to out of the European Union. And that delays our departure for two years. And it was very interesting listening to Mr Milburn earlier pointing out that the poorest areas of the country voted to leave. We need to deliver the benefits of leaving to the poorest in our nation, because otherwise they will feel deeply let down, and that includes dealing with freedom of movement and it includes getting a free trade deal so that we can lower the cost of food, clothing and footwear.

AM: Let me ask you about the Irish border, which is another big issue which has arisen recently. We've had lots of comments about it, including from Peter Robinson of DUP, who is essentially suggesting the Irish government are using this not in a fraternal way but to achieve a united Ireland by stealth. Do you agree with him?

JRM: Well, Irish politics are quite complicated at the moment, as you know, because there's a vote of no confidence in the Deputy Irish Prime Minister. They are worried about his election. And I think the Irish border has become a matter of Irish immediate political concern in the run-up to a potential general election and the strength of Sinn Fein, and the Prime Minister of Ireland's concern about that. Whether I'd go as far as saying it's an effort to unify the republic and Northern Ireland by stealth, I don't know. But I would say very clearly, speaking from Somerset, that

Northern Ireland is as much a part of the United Kingdom as Somerset is and Conservatives and Unionists take that very seriously. It is of the essence, the core of what we believe of our nation, and I support the DUP thoroughly, as do many Conservatives, if not most Conservatives, in opposing any attempt to take Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom in its terms of trade with the European Union.

AM: Isn't the truth, therefore, that if we leave without an agreement there has to be a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? Because that is the EU's border as well as the Irish Republic's border?

JRM: No, that's not the case. That is a choice that may be made. The British government has made it clear that it won't make it. The head of Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs has said that there is no need for the UK to have a border. If the Irish and the EU wish to impose a border that would be a matter for them. But they don't have to do it. It is a question of political choice. You have to say to the Irish government do you make that political choice to impose a border when the British government will not make that choice?

AM: You spent a convivial hour or two recently with Steve Bannon, President Trump's former adviser. He is an economic nationalist and many people who've worked with him think he is a white supremacist as well. What were you doing talking to him?

JRM: Well, I've talked to any number of people whose political views I do not share or fully endorse. I met the previous American Ambassador in a reception at his own embassy and he was a leftwing Obama supporter. So inevitably politicians meet other politicians, and that doesn't mean that they agree with or endorse everything they say. But Mr Bannon was the chief of staff to President Trump and is a senior figure within the Republican Party. I think 'convivial' is misleading. It was very interesting to meet him. He's very well informed.

AM: And would you like to see President Trump come here in February?

JRM: Mr Trump is the leader of our closest and most important ally. A nation with whom we have many interests in common in all sorts of areas, not least defence. It is overwhelmingly, in the British interest to have a friendly relationship with the leader of the free world, and that is true whoever the President happens to be. And it is the duty of the British Prime Minister to ensure that that happens and Mr Blair was actually very good at that as Prime Minister, in ensuring that he got on with a right wing American President who he didn't agree with on everything.

AM: You're a civilised man, I'm sure. When you saw those retweets of that racist, fascist group Britain First by the President of the United States, did you not pause for thought and think here is a man crossing a really important boundary in civilised discourse?

JRM: Well, dare I say, though I am on Twitter I think it is a fundamentally trivial medium, and it is not worth spending so much time fussing about it. I think it inevitably leads to people tweeting appalling stuff because it's such an unimportant medium.

AM: Jacob Ree-Mogg, something we can agree on at last. Thank you very much indeed.

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