

This site uses cookies to improve the user experience. By using this site, you agree that we can set and use these cookies. For more details on the cookies we use and how to manage them, see our Privacy and Cookie Policy.



PDFmvUR

But despite the political and practical objections a Norway soft Brexit could actually provide the way forward.

There are in fact two groups within the Norway faction. Some hope for the re-entry of the United Kingdom into the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and consequently into the European Economic Area (EEA), effectively the single market. Others prefer the negotiation of a bespoke association agreement, which would be more or less based on the same principles, but with specific institutions, and possibly with separate access to the EFTA Court. In both cases, it could be necessary to negotiate in parallel a customs union agreement.

Of course, the UK's re-entry into the EFTA and EEA would require the approval of the EFTA members, and of the EU. Most probably some institutional adjustments will have to be discussed, in the short- to medium-term, because the UK's presence will modify the nature of EFTA. The UK's weight will also need to be reflected in the make-up of the EFTA secretariat.

However, if politicians still have the strategic vision (a big if), all parties should show some flexibility. Though the re-entry of the UK into EFTA would change the organisation's present cosiness, it would also very substantially increase its members' influence. This consideration would also apply to the UK. Though some nostalgic minds seem to hanker after splendid isolation, belonging to a coalition of states with privileged trade access to the single market would be much more efficient. The EU itself has a strong incentive to create a functioning structure for all neighbouring states unwilling or unable to participate in its political objectives but desiring strong trade cooperation. The present "neighbourhood policy" for nearby countries demonstrates this while mammoth preferential trade agreements have been proliferating in all directions.

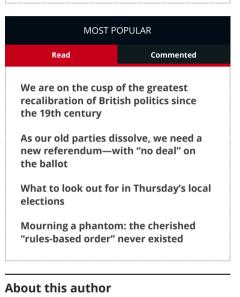
It would be most useful to establish an EU/UK customs union beside the EEA. This addition would be something new. As such, it will require some technical inventiveness. Additionally, the proponents of a custom union in the UK want a say over the negotiation of EU trade agreements with third parties. Though this is also new, there exist ways to accommodate this wish. And, again, it would be in the interests of all parties involved.

Although there will be technical difficulties (like in all broad negotiations), these would be quite limited compared to the organisation of a hard Brexit solution. This alternative would require the definition of a brand new regime for trade in goods and services. In the field of goods, the UK would not benefit any more from the conclusion of EU agreements with third countries. You would fall back on the framework of the WTO. Compared to that, the EEA option could quickly look like a walk in the park.

The EEA's problems are more political than technical. In a very stimulating comment published in *Prospect*, Anand Menon argued "the awkward truth is that a Norway Brexit almost certainly wouldn't work." This seems like a very categorical conclusion, whereas the outcome depends fundamentally on what one wants. The EEA option could work, provided its partners are really committed to making it work.

The fundamental political problem of hard Brexit and no Brexit is they will each be appalling for one half of the British population. After either of those two outcomes the Brexit debate will go on, and on, and on. That could be a real curse. But "it looks as if possibly nearly two-thirds of voters, and almost certainly a majority of them, could probably live with Norway-plus."





# Fra

Franklin Dehousse Franklin Dehousse is a former negotiator of EU Treaties and European judge

Follow Franklin on:

More by this author

### More by Franklin Dehousse

**Brexit seen from the continent** August 9, 2018

Britain's proposal on the European Court of Justice is riddled with contradiction July 11, 2018



There are basically three possible outcomes to Brexit: hard Brexit, soft Brexit and no Brexit. Nearly three years after the referendum, the EU still does not know what the UK wants. Brexit has utterly divided the whole country, and this does not seem likely to abate. If anything, the Brexiteers and Remainers appear more radicalised.

There lies the rub. Soft Brexit is an unwanted child, because it does not satisfy at all this appetite for radicalisation. It thus requires courage from politicians, since they are denounced as traitors by both sides. Those who show this courage should be commended.

According to Churchill, "democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms." It could be said that EEA is the worst form of Brexit except for all those other forms. So it's time for both tribes to realise soft Brexit is the least unsatisfactory outcome for all, and they will not find anything better, given the present state of the country. This is called compromise, and democracies cannot live without it.

#### **GO TO COMMENTS**

### **Related articles**



Your guide to revoking Article 50 Paphael Hegarth (April 24, 2019





After the Article 50 judgment Stephen Hornsby / January 4, 2019

Why the European Court should never have ruled on Britain's right to revoke the Brexit...



#### SPONSORED FEATURES

Advancing social equality

Liam Fox interview—A world beyond Europe

A forward thinking approach

Trade that is fair for all

Ports: the backbone of Global Britain

<u>Prospect</u> Think Tank

Awards 2019

Enter your think tank now

Deadline for entries: Friday 19th April



#### Comments



May 6, 2019 at 11:31

Sensible stuff - and therefore in cloud-cuckoo-land. As has been noted elsewhere, the simple 'Leave' dogma, which was open about trade, has now grown to a dislike and distrust of all aspects of the EU. Unless more moderate voices are in an electoral majority, we will end up on WTO terms, with no major bespoke trade deals for many years to come.



Leave a comment

You can **log in** to post a comment under your subscriber name.





#### Mail (will not be published) \*



Human verification - please type the words/numbers from the image:

Post Comme

# Subscribe to Prospect today



## Prospect

The magazine is owned and supported by the Resolution Group, as part of its notfor-profit, public interest activities.



#### Editorial

Editor: Tom Clark Deputy Editor: Steve Bloomfield Managing Editor (Arts & Books): Sameer Rahim Head of Digital: Stephanie Boland Commissioning Editor: Alex Dean Digital Assistant: Rebecca Liu Creative Director: Mike Turner Production Editor & Designer: Chris Tilbury US Writer-at-Large: Sam Tanenhaus

#### Commercial

Commercial Director: Alex Stevenson Head of Marketing: Paul Mortimer Marketing & Circulation Executive: Rebecca Ricci Head of Events: Victoria Jackson Head of Advertising Sales: Adam Kinlan 020 3372 2934 Senior Account Manager: Dominic Slonecki 0203 372 2972

Home / Advertising / Contact Us / Privacy Policy / Terms and Conditions / Acceptable Use Policy

© Prospect Publishing Limited

