

Ivan Rogers



UK Permanent Representative to the EU November 2013 – January 2017

Prime Minister's Adviser on Europe and Global Issues November 2011 – November 2013

27 November 2020

Cameron and the European Union, 2012 – 2015

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Thinking back to your arrival after David Cameron had just vetoed the Fiscal Compact, can you reflect on where relations with the EU were at that point, and also what lessons, if any, the Cameron government drew from that episode?

Ivan Rogers (IR): I formally came in the day after that, but I had been there sitting in the attic in the Cabinet Office for six weeks. Seeing Jon (Cunliffe) every day and, indeed, the rest of the EGIS (European and Global Issues Secretariat) team and the whole of the Whitehall team to get my head around events, because I'd been out of Whitehall for five and a half years at that point so although I was fluent on a lot of what had happened, I had left the policy scene in 2006.

So I'd been doing my homework. What was obvious in November 2011 was that Jon had been sent on a kamikaze mission: or at least the kamikaze way of fulfilling an extremely tough, not to say wholly undeliverable, mission. You know, it was obvious to me what was going on and how he was trying to do it and what was boiling up.

The context, which others will have told you, is essentially growing trouble

inside the Conservative Party at the idea that, yet again, we would be obliged to have treaty changes put through the House of Commons at speed in order to save the Eurozone. And (David) Cameron and (George) Osborne were saying to European opposite numbers, there was nothing in it for us. Well, nothing directly, that is, because although saving the Eurozone from tumult was critical, it did nothing for the backbenchers. So, they'd been doing the kind of big bazooka language, particularly Cameron, through much of 2011. Which was one of the first things I came in and said: 'I would shut up about the big bazooka: it's better to give your advice on how they need to step up to save monetary union privately, and not be thought to be revelling in their crisis.'

So that was the context. Jon had drafted this thing, actually with Nikhil Rathi, then at the Treasury. So, the draft protocol that Jon was trying to negotiate was the counterparty for agreeing the Fiscal Compact Treaty with the 27: 17 in the Eurozone, 10 outside at that point. Jon had been instructed to go and negotiate that direct with Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut, the German Sherpa, and get the Germans on board, and in turn for the Germans to get the French on board with our demands in order that we should acquiesce in agreeing the Fiscal Compact Treaty at 27, and legislating that change domestically. So, as I say, I'm a bystander on this, I'm watching it, I'm aware of what's in the draft protocol although I don't think I saw the text until quite late in November; he'd obviously been trying to negotiate it before then.

And that's what goes really horribly wrong before the famous night of the European Council. Where they get screwed is that the French and the Germans meet in the EPP pre-Council formation two days before at Marseilles. (Angela) Merkel and (Nicolas) Sarkozy essentially think 'Cameron's trying to hold us hostage and trying to screw us up'. They obviously decided what they were going to do, how they were going to choreograph it, what they were going to try and urge Herman Van Rompuy to do on the night at the European Council later that week.

Jon is negotiating all this at sherpa level, and you would need to get his account of the precise legal advice that Hubert Légal (head of the Council Legal Service) gave to the sherpas' meeting the night before the European Council. That legal advice essentially gave the U.K. comfort that there was no

way simply to go round us. Jon remains pretty shocked that on the following night at leaders' level, oddly enough Legal gave virtually exactly the opposite advice to leaders.

There's the whole gory story. Herman Van Rompuy then doesn't give David Cameron the floor until six hours into European Council meeting, by which time he's basically been stitched up.

Cameron's perhaps slow to realise that week that he's being stitched up, I can't really judge whether Jon was slow to realise it. Unlikely. I was not in the key meetings running up to the Council, and when the Council gets underway, you know, you're just sitting in the delegation room. I'm obviously not a gold badge or red badge holder at that juncture, I'm just sitting there as an observer really. Philip Rycroft is there as well, I think, because Nick Clegg had to be represented, but Clegg wasn't invited. William Hague, the Foreign Secretary is there – most unusual – because they do start to realise after Marseilles that it's potentially going pear shaped, so Hague's hands have to be dipped in the blood, if there could be major ructions brewing in the party after the Council.

That's what happens on European Council night. It was in some ways of course one of those nights you never forget, as you can imagine. Because Hague's in the delegation room, they're ringing up Clegg in the middle of the night to say it's gone horribly wrong, and that the PM had therefore had to wield a veto, in order to force the Eurozone leaders to go outside the EU Treaties framework. Painful phone calls from the delegation room; obviously big coalition troubles with Clegg – why would he welcome the PM wielding the veto? – and so forth.

But that's the moment I come in formally. So, as I say, you need Jon and Kim (Darroch)'s account, which may be at some variance because, as you know, there were some tensions between Jon and the FCO over the handling. There's quite a lot to read in the Financial Times and elsewhere at the time on those tensions. And I suppose the honest answer is it was actually quite a good time to walk in because it was such a truly disastrous moment – a disastrous moment for Cameron, which he turned to domestic advantage, albeit rather briefly, with the 'veto' word, with but also a disastrous break between us and the Europeans.

There really was, I think, a question in Downing Street the week I walk in as to whether this was the beginning of the end, and we were going to leave the European Union – and pretty rapidly – because it had been such a dramatic break, and questions of bad faith were really reverberating on both sides of the Channel.

And then we had a sort of gloomy wash up in which, as you can imagine, (Jeremy) Heywood said something like, ‘We’ve got to have a post-mortem of that, how the hell did we end up in this situation?’ Recriminations are flying between the Foreign Office and Jon above all, because some in the Foreign Office see the opportunity to blame Jon on it, but know that Jon is about to go to UKREP (UK Mission to the European Union) – which is why I’d landed the job. The Foreign Office hated ‘losing’ UKREP to the Treasury. So it was all pretty tense and bloody.

I come in, a new boy at that point, not knowing any of the political figures, basically saying to Jeremy, ‘I’m really not sure about the wisdom of having a formal post-mortem on what went wrong here: it would be rather long, it’d be rather conflictual, I very much doubt there would be real agreement on why it had gone pear-shaped, and it’s going to be rather sterile to spend months of our lives working out what went wrong when we now have a crisis to manage.’

So that’s where I come back in. The good news, the advantage for me I suppose, and I think Jon said this to me and others did, is that I was pretty well-known around the European circuit because I’d been in the Commission and been around the ECOFIN circuit and a Treasury rep at European Councils for quite a long time. So I’d got plenty of old mates and allies around the circuit, and in a sense then absolutely everybody wants to talk to you because it had been so obviously a near disaster, and tell you it had been a near rupture moment and ask ‘What on earth was going on there? Why was Jon instructed to do something so lunatic with the Germans?’

I got on pretty well with Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut. We had different backgrounds but we understood each other. The Germans had evidently just thought on the draft Protocol – which of course never saw the light of day – this is a truly bizarre document, with these six demands, three of which were returns of key dossiers to unanimity from QMV. Clearly never going to be agreed. It revealed – and was obviously intended to tackle – all the fears the U.K. had about the

risk that our fundamental interests could be undermined by an automatic qualified majority of Eurozone members against our wishes. My view was, and remains, that those were very legitimate fears. We actually face precisely these issues – now from outside the club – right now. But it was an insanely complex and demanding thing to try and negotiate at immense speed, and the Germans obviously read this document, which they viewed several pages of classic peremptory British demands, setting out how we wanted to get the relationship between the Eurozone and the non-Eurozone right, to work, as British hostage-taking at a moment of extreme Eurozone fragility.

The demands were over the top, much as they pinpointed things which were really serious issues for us – not least things like a European Central Bank ‘location policy’ on where various financial activities needed to be located, which we can see is back to haunt us again now we have left and can actually now do much less legally to prevent it. As Andrew Bailey is in the process of discovering. I can only assume Meyer-Landrut sent it to Merkel essentially saying, ‘You wouldn’t believe what this guy has just brought me.’ They must have sent it straight away to the French and concluded with the French, ‘The only way to deal with these guys, if Cameron follows through on a veto threat, is to go around them and produce an intergovernmental treaty to achieve the same thing rather than do this thing at 27-level, because the British are just going to block us.’

What’s the long-term consequence of this? I said this in my Hertford lecture back in 2017: the long-term consequence is that Cameron thinks, ‘They have found a way around me, I can’t stop these people in future, they can find intergovernmental routes around my objections. So I can’t force through changes for the U.K. at the same time as they deliver changes to suit themselves. And at some time in the first half of 2012, he consequently decides he’s got to go for an in-out referendum.

So there’s a direct line from the Fiscal Compact fiasco to the decision to go for an in-out referendum. And, by the time that decision was taken, which was in the summer of 2012 – neither Jon nor I were in the room for any of the key conversations between Hague, Osborne and Cameron, but we were well aware they were going on – we were told by Ed Llewellyn by the summer of 2012 the decision is taken, we will commit in the next manifesto to having an in-out referendum.

UKICE: So the key motivation for in-out referendum is the need to recover a bit of governance in the face of Eurozone reform, rather than the other concerns that David Cameron put on the table in the Bloomberg speech?

IR: Yes; people persistently completely misunderstand the immediate origins of the referendum decision even if, like me, they think the crisis was inevitable and had been in the works for much longer. Well, Bloomberg came directly out of that December crisis, because you will remember all his jokes about tantric sex and all the kind of stuff over how long Bloomberg had taken. We originally thought that what became Bloomberg was going to be in September 2012, and it kept on being postponed and then we had ridiculous shenanigans over where the venue was going to be, because he was originally going to do it in The Hague.

Then, having postponed, we ended up somehow deliberately choosing the 50th anniversary of the Élysée Franco-German Treaty, which was a hilariously bad choice. And we ended up doing it at Bloomberg's building in London the day before Cameron went to Davos to launch his G8 Presidency; hence the Bloomberg title, but it had taken four or five months' gestation.

Ed Llewellyn drafted it over and over and over again, and virtually every time Jon, I and others inserted more positive stuff about our vision for Europe to make it rather less UK-specific. And every time it reached the politicians and the Spads, they took virtually all of it out again. So I and others were saying there has to be a positive pan-European vision, this can't just be British exceptionalism, British specificity. You've got to say not just what your vision is of Europe, but why your vision of Europe is compatible with others' vision and why we've got to push Europe in a different direction. Others have got to want, and be politically able to, buy into large parts of this.

And much of that stuff progressively got taken out, and there were just sterile fights which went on for weeks and weeks and weeks over draft after draft after draft about what it was going to say. But the one thing Ed always told us is the centre point of it will be – has to be – a commitment to an in-out referendum, because we've got to turn this into a bigger issue. They have found a way around us. We found that we can't block further Eurozone integration because they can always go intergovernmental in Eurozone formation. The only way to do it is to turn it into a bigger issue.

UKICE: What were you saying to your sherpa colleagues about the Bloomberg speech or the development of that? Presumably you were doing some pitch rolling with them to ensure that they received it well?

IR: Yes. Well, they didn't receive it well and they were never going to, of course. Why are EU establishment figures, having just lived through Lisbon, and more than one referendum failure on the Constitutional Treaty, going to welcome it? So, I didn't try and bullshit people because there's no way around the fact that one commitment is central and all the rest is nice-to-hear blather to their ears. Plenty of Bloomberg was fine on, you know, trade policy and the Single Market and all the rest of it, it was all perfectly fine. But the elephant in the room was a commitment to an in-out referendum if there were a Tory majority. You just can't bullshit people around that, they didn't welcome it. Why would they?

I do think Mario Monti, the recently arrived Italian PM and ex Commissioner desperately wanted to help. He was both a fervent European and a genuine Anglophile economic liberal. I went with Cameron to Rome to see Monti, and Monti was in very professorial mode about what the problem was and where they could conceivably help. And of course, Monti being an old style Christian Democrat and technocrat and very close to what had been British Tory thinking on competition policy and internal market policy, persistently misunderstood what Cameron wanted and needed, and said, 'We could work up all kinds of things together between Italy and the UK about the progressive deepening of the Single Market project, and more enforcement with more teeth.'

And I kept on saying to the Italians, 'Yes, I know, but he knows Leon' – he was a very big friend and fan of Leon Brittan, and he was friendly with the Ken Clarke generation – and I just kept on saying to them, 'and we're just not there anymore. You think that we want a more powerful and more rigorous enforcement mechanisms, both on competition policy and the Single Market. That's the last bloody thing we want: we are much less keen than we once were on driving forward and deepening market integration: that's become a negative, not a goal, for Conservatives.'" So one kept on having to explain, 'Look, you're not dealing with an old generation of Tories who believe in any of that stuff. Cameron does want to find a way to stay in. But he needs a looser relationship, not a deepened one. He does not want to halt your deeper integration: he thinks you need it. But he doesn't want to be part of it. He's

under immense pressure in his party. Things are getting worse in his party because you keep on having Eurozone disasters which then cause explosions in our politics.'

Jon explained it very well to me at the outset when I came back into Whitehall: they (the EU member states) cannot understand why the Eurozone crisis is causing more explosions in our politics than in their politics. It's quite bad enough in their politics but we're the ones seemingly going through the bigger existential crisis. Why is this causing more destabilisation of UK politics than most EU member states' politics, given they are the ones in the storm, and we are the ones more in the shelter?

I spent an awful lot of time running around Europe: getting to know opposite numbers, going and seeing their key establishments, doing a huge amount of travelling, just trying to roll the pitch and explain where has this got to politically, why and how has it got here, why is this becoming an existential question for us. I think somebody said to me the other month from the Council, I was the first person to mention the word Brexit to them. I think they said that was in 2011 before I even formally started. Certainly by early 2012 we were talking about it seriously.

UKICE: What, you coined the term, Ivan? Did you call it Brexit?

IR: I don't think I did – I certainly was using the term Brexit then, because they were calling the Greek crisis Grexit. There were various sessions with a fair number of the European illuminati whom I knew, and because I'd been inside the beltway and inside the system, as it were. I was frequently the only Brit invited to those sessions. It's both an advantage and a disadvantage because frequently you get to hear the conversation which is going on when the British aren't in the room, including Eurozone conversations about what is ever going to be viable in political economy terms. But you know it's not a conversation that translates well to any of our top political class.

And because I was regarded as a Brit who actually understood the game as they viewed it unlike most Brits, you do get invited to those things. And one of them, and I can't remember whether it was late 2011 or early 2011, they'd all done a kind of 'Where is Grexit? Where are we going? The fragmentation of, the divergence within, the Eurozone, the banking union, whatever'. And I was

asked to do a big spiel on the British question, and where this might it go.

And what I said obviously gobsnacked many people. I said: 'You're all obsessing about Grexit, you're obviously right to obsess about Grexit, you shouldn't allow Grexit to happen because it could be the unravelling of the Eurozone. You're going to have to think very hard about contagion risks, which are severe. Our advice from the UK is definitely not to permit Grexit to happen. But you guys need urgently to be thinking about Brexit because, while you don't see that this is real, if there's a Tory majority government it is real and it might very well happen.'

And I was obviously the first person to say that in blunt terms to the beltway mob, 'This is real, it's not fictional,' because I still had a problem even by the time I became Permanent Representative late in 2013. Virtually everybody there still thought Ed Miliband would win the election and I kept on saying as a neutral bureaucrat, 'I really don't think I would take that for granted. I think Cameron could well win the election, it may be just a question whether he gets an overall majority or not. And if the Tories get an overall majority... indeed, even if they don't – politically, he now has to deliver on the Bloomberg promise, or he is out". But everybody's saying to me, even when I arrived as Perm Rep in November 2013, 'Yeah, but he won't go through with that speech, there's absolutely no way. It's insane, why would he have an in-out referendum?'

So I spent an awful lot of 2014 saying to people, 'If it comes to it and there's a Tory majority government, we are fully committed and we will remain committed to an in-out referendum, and it will happen. And you're going to have to negotiate in advance of it. I know you're going to hate it, but...'

So to be very clear: December 2011 is the key moment at which the endgame really starts. I mean, Brexit starts in 1973, it becomes a real issue certainly from 1992, but the real start of the endgame is December 2011, in my view.

UKICE: In terms of civil service advice, you've given us the impression that the speech itself was very much developed by the politicians and the special advisors. But was there any civil service advice about the potential problems of coming out?

IR: No, not at that point. I don't think so. I can't recall it, if so. I think the advice that Jon and I both gave, and we were certainly on completely the same page, was 'Look, it may all seem a long way away to you, but none of this renegotiation would even start until you won an election in 2015. And if you win an election in 2015, you're saying you must put this relationship on a firmer footing. In other words, there's got to be renegotiation and there's got to be treaty level change before you have a referendum.'

Treaty change is a huge barrier. This is, in the jargon, a simplified revision procedure (SRP) or an ordinary revision procedure (ORP). If you want truly fundamental change, it's not obvious it can be SRP. I had loads of discussions with Meyer-Landrut in particular, in 2012 and 2013, about surgical treaty changes, and what could conceivably be done under SRP rather than ORP.

I'd forgotten about most of this stuff but it's sort of coming back now you're mentioning it. So we had loads of discussions. As Merkel said to Cameron during 2012, when we were first discussing the EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework) thing, 'We might be able to put together a set of surgical strike treaty changes, all of which are SRP, not ORP, and get that done and dusted.' Why were they hoping to do that? Because, candidly, they wanted to eliminate the European Parliament from the equation and they didn't want to have some huge, unwieldy intergovernmental conference and convention process.

So being an old intergovernmental conference bore, and Jon knew plenty about this as well, I'm saying, 'Look, once you get into an intergovernmental conference, it's long, it's tortuous, you have the European Parliament, let alone all the member states. They all have their agendas. You hate a high proportion of those agendas. Look at Lisbon, which is the result of one. It's inherently uncontrollable. An awful lot of people you view as out to lunch will come to the table with their own demands, many of which are precisely in the opposite direction from your own demands. It gets wholly out of control and it's extremely lengthy.'

You're saying, 'So, Prime Minister, all of this would only kick off in spring-summer 2015 and it's closed down by the autumn of 2016 because of French elections and German elections, which mean their political class is in closedown. If you don't get it out of the way well before then ... so it may sound

like you've got an awful lot of time but you would only be kicking this off more than two years from now, and then you would have a window of about a maximum of a year, and if you hadn't concluded within that time, it would all be off until the French and German elections are over. And then it's too late to get anything done and ratified until 2018. Which is after we'd have had our Presidency of the EU – which was scheduled for the second half of 2017.

So, Jon and I are both saying, 'If you genuinely have to have treaty change – permanent, enshrined change in the treaties in some fundamental way which further entrenches key bits of British exceptionalism – give yourself the whole of the next Parliament to do so. You just can't set that up by the end of 2017.'

And Cameron essentially said – and perfectly reasonably – 'I can't bloody do that. We're in 2012,' (which is when we're having these discussions), 'and you guys are basically telling me I would have to tell my party that in order to deliver permanent institutional change to entrench the version of European Union membership we want, I might have to give myself 8 years. I can't possibly do that. I've got to say this will be done in the first half of the next Parliament if we win an overall Tory majority.'

And from then on, you know, frankly we're staring at the abyss in my view. I'm obviously not known for my optimism, but I'm thinking: you've set yourself a target where the whole thing will have to be agreed and ratified via treaty change by the second half of 2017, which we knew was the UK presidency. So do this under the UK presidency, a huge triumph under the UK presidency, get it done and dusted. But to achieve that, you know that the negotiation would have to have ended by the summer of 2016, otherwise the French and Germans are both in close-down. And you just can't do fundamental Treaty change on that timescale.

Now we're jumping around a bit here, but it also became clear in 2013 that Merkel was pressing separately for treaty changes for the Eurozone, mostly to deliver so-called 'bindingness' on structural reform. So she wants her own treaty changes after the Eurozone crisis of 2011-2012, to force structural reform on the recalcitrant South in treaty terms they cannot wriggle out of. I can't off the top of my head remember the exact articles of the treaty anymore but she was looking to revise them to deliver that.

But it becomes obvious to the Germans that they're not getting anywhere at all with the French, and François Hollande and the French are leading a sort of Club Med backlash: 'We're not having any of this, and if we're going to agree anything new at all on structural reform, we're going to have serious solidarity' – in other words, German taxpayers' money – in exchange. It becomes completely obvious to the Germans well before the end of 2013 that they're just not going to get anywhere on Eurozone treaty changes.

So all the 2012 optimism between Merkel and Cameron along the lines of: 'We might be able to deliver a package of surgical strike treaty changes around Eurozone and add some for you, David,' it's all sort of completely evaporating in the mist by the end of 2013.

And that's the point where obviously I start working on what became the Danish model. Then, by the time I'm in UKREP, I'm working with some smart folk, including Jeppe Tranholm-Mikkelsen who was a good friend of mine and still is a good friend of mine, now Secretary General of the Council, a man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Treaties and the history, because he was in Copenhagen early in his career working on the 1992 Danish model, which gave the Danes the permanent and binding changes for Denmark they needed in order to be able to ratify Maastricht. And you want something – some template – which delivers quick but binding, permanent institutional change in treaty form but without requiring treaty change, for which there's just simply no political appetite in the rest of the 28.

And that's why we alighted on the methodology that got us to the package of February 2016. That's partly my fault, but my political instructions were to find a way to deliver visibly binding and permanent change, and the route to a conventional treaty change was completely blocked. So what do you do? We're cudgelling our brains even pre the 2015 election for the methodology which enables us to get something permanent, binding, constitutional in nature change which Cameron can point to and say, 'That has treaty status, and it's lodged at the UN with treaty status', but which doesn't require an intergovernmental conference, which no-one wants and would obviously go wrong even if they did, and a whole set of EU treaty changes.

UKICE: They're doing this in Brussels, Ivan, what preparatory work is going on back in Whitehall for a prospective renegotiation? There are things like the

Balance of Competences review which you may have your views on. Is there anything actually going on usefully in Whitehall between 2010 and 2015 to develop UK thinking?

IR: A bit, yes. We've already scrolled forward beyond the budget process into 2013 and 2014, I think by that stage. And that EU Budget round, let's remember, was huge and controversial. Yes, the Balance of Competences review. Look, I don't want to be unkind about it, it was a genuinely interesting and significant process and we spent a huge amount of time on it; and Angus Lapsley pretty much spent his life on it. In all honesty, politically, though, at the level of the PM, it was a space filler. I mean, poor Angus got frustrated because neither Cameron nor most senior Cabinet Ministers took it as seriously as officials had to – and did. And we spent an inordinate amount of time across the system writing and refining these documents. It mattered to some Ministers too, for different reasons.

But I think Cameron really thought this was just filling the space between here and the next general election. And of course it rather confused Europeans because they thought actually they're coming up with some serious, reputable, very solid stuff, classically British, very well drafted, extremely well organised, and it mostly seemed to demonstrate that the bulk of the competences in the right place and being exercised at the right level. And frankly, as the U.K. Sherpa, you're saying to opposite numbers, 'Yeah, yeah, I know it says that, but I really wouldn't take that altogether too seriously if I were you, because, politically, that's just obviously not going to be the right or sustainable answer.'

UKICE: Do you think that David Cameron could have handled the Europe issue better, domestically or in a different way than he did? In that Parliament, the coalition government, when you have the defections to UKIP going on and he was clearly running scared.

IR: Well, as you say he was clearly in political difficulty by the autumn of 2014, so we're scrolling forward there to the Carswell and Reckless defections and the panic over free movement after the end of the seven-year transition period for Romanian and Bulgarian accession. Remember? The media determined to hunt for the post transition surge in Roma arrivals. The UKIP surge in the polls for the 2014 European elections.

Look, it's obviously hard to think he couldn't have handled it any better, because I don't think it was all very brilliant handling. But that is very easy for a bureaucrat to say isn't it? This was a guy under immense pressure who comes into office, which was when I'm not there, promising to stop 'banging on' about Europe, promising to lance the boil, calm it all down. And as he constantly said to Frau Merkel with some justice, 'You guys all told me there would be no institutional and no treaty changes for my first Parliament. And now I'm having to deal with the third such Treaty change in 18 months basically because you're mishandling your crisis, and it's causing me mayhem in my party.' Which, as I say, they – rather understandably, really – never understood: why is *our* crisis precipitating your politics into an existential meltdown? You are only in those parts of the Union which are largely untouched by the crisis.

And they weren't that sympathetic because they thought he was holding them hostage and, as they're trying to deliver Eurozone institutional change, here's our PM coming up with overblown financial services demands for the benefit of his party. And then even adding social policy demands – back to the Tory Social Chapter obsessions – which in the end, I think, were knifed by Nick Clegg. Which is why, rather bizarrely, we ended up with that draft Protocol being devoted solely to financial services and stability issues. Which, to the EU, had nothing whatever to do with the issues at hand.

But Cameron's perspective is, 'Look, you promised me a serious period of inactivity after Lisbon.' Bear in mind he had promised on Lisbon that if it hadn't been ratified by the time he took office, he would have put it to a referendum and recommended no. He told me even in the interview I had with him, 'I'm against the Lisbon Treaty, and had it still been a live issue when I took office, I would have held a referendum on it and I would have advocated no.' So we'd have had the 'British crisis' then over the Lisbon Treaty because he would have held a referendum. And very obviously, he would have won that vote and taken it into the EU as a mandate for a different renegotiation.

I think he was honest on that. His party of course is inflamed by that because they heard the first bit but they didn't hear the second bit. They heard the first bit that he didn't like Lisbon, but they didn't hear the bit that, 'If it's been ratified by the time I take office, I'm not going to be able to do anything about

it.' So, they're in tumult on Lisbon being in force, we've been screwed by Lisbon, Gordon Brown's got through something which is akin to the Constitutional Treaty they hate: what are you going to do about it?

We then had to deal – in a Coalition with another Party which believed virtually none of the same things – with all the ERG types who bedevilled Cameron's life through that parliament looking for ways to entrench/recapture UK sovereignty, primarily via caveats and carve-outs on the 1972 European Communities Act, which they hated, because the supremacy of EU law was what they always actually wanted to demolish. But those are demands which of course are tantamount to having the ability not to apply anything domestically on which you had been outvoted or had to agree to something suboptimal. And if the U.K. ever had that, everyone else would need the same. And on what basis could you argue they shouldn't? At which point, self evidently, the EU is kaput. And the cleverer ones knew that very well. Which is exactly why they wanted it. All the pressure is on him, so could he have handled this better given that all the energy on the issues in his Party is coming from people who either clearly want Brexit or want things so obviously unnegotiable that they lead directly to Brexit. No really, if you have had Tory MPs say to you – and I have – that they want to remain in the EU, but only if we can have our own trade policy within it, or that they want to remain, but we must be able to decide the numbers of people year by year coming in under free movement, you think 'Well, you may say you want to remain, but believe me, you don't and I am not sure you really expect me to believe otherwise.'

The difficulty is by the time he's in office – and bear in mind, to get into office and to get the leadership he's already taken the Conservatives out of the EPP – his party is pretty largely out of control on the European question. It's what we're now all experiencing again, the revolutionaries had made a breach in the walls and they were already all over the top of the party. He feels – said it to us repeatedly – that he is a genuine Eurosceptic, unenamoured frankly of most elements of EU integration, who had actually been well on the right of the party debate in the 90s, but now found the centre of gravity shifting ever harder-line sceptic beneath him. He is thinking this is obsessive crap driven by the ultras and he is thinking 'I don't want my Government to be dominated by this, and least of all a coalition government with a partner we need on a post financial crisis domestic agenda, which does not agree with us on virtually all of our European thinking'. But it keeps on popping up because the Eurozone

keeps getting into serious trouble.

So could he have handled better? Let's be honest. Not easy, surely. This is not a very strong Number 10. Okay, it may look like a strong and unified Number 10 in comparison with the current one, but it's certainly not a strong Number 10 in terms of management of the party. Much of the party didn't trust Ed Llewellyn or Dan Korski or Mats Persson or any of the rest of them. Mats was probably a little bit closer to mainstream Eurosceptic sentiment and that's why he was brought in.

But did they have an effective party management operation on the European question? No, nothing very discernible to officials, and Ed Llewellyn was anyway perceived by the Eurosceptics anyway to be a sort of dreadful Chris Patten type Europe lover, so they weren't trusted by the Eurosceptics in their own party. Cameron himself didn't work that hard in the tea rooms or outside the tea rooms to endear himself to the party, or to explain to them what he had in mind on the EU and where he was going.

So they didn't have a super effective operation politically, and the sad thing, and this includes the renegotiation for me and Tom (Scholar), an awful lot of the pitch rolling, political reality explaining, stuff that perhaps really ought to have been done by the Spads and the political classes was done by me or by Tom (by this time the Sherpa) because there wasn't anybody else to do it really.

And you're having conversations which sometimes made me slightly nervous as Permanent Representative and Sherpa, because you think, 'I'm straying into offering 'political' explanations of negotiating realities, because no one, with the honourable exception of David Lidington as Europe Minister, was capable of having – or deeply informed and focussed enough to have – the conversations which explained to other capitals where the bloody hell we, or at least where the Tory side of the Coalition were, on anything important and why.

The renegotiation

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): When it came to the actual renegotiation, was there a plan, was there a blueprint, or was it just turn up and see what we can get under these headings?

Ivan Rogers (IR): Well, they produce the Conservative manifesto, and it's quite extraordinary what is in the manifesto and what isn't in the manifesto, and just how incredibly thin it is. And I was told at the time – we were obviously not part of the manifesto writing and rightly not privy to any of it – that there was actually very little discussion in party circles and in Cameron's circles about what was going to go into the manifesto. And this is really remarkable when you think about it, because anyone with a brain could see that if they won, the issue would completely dominate the entire term till 2020. As it duly has, though it proved to require two more terms and two more Prime Ministers.

So Tom and I are saying to them: look, this is rather critical you know, if you win this election you are committed to an in-out referendum. You have to commit yourself to what are you trying to renegotiate, what does it look like? Don't bind yourself to any number of specifics which are going to be undeliverable. But be clear what the purpose and general level of ambition is.

There was a big immigration speech in November 2014. And I sent back a pile of mostly unwelcome legal advice about what was doable and what wasn't doable within the treaties (which, as I say, it was, by then, completely obvious that we would anyway not be able to reopen), and was trying to persuade him and Osborne and Hague, plus the special advisors, 'Don't pin yourself to something which is clearly undeliverable without getting a Treaty change you cannot currently get.'

They had, I think, something of an obsession about going back really to the world of pre-1992 and a version of free movement that frankly hadn't existed since then, and redefining free movement. They were basically right of course that free movement had reached a totally different scale after enlargement, and that no-one had really seriously thought about that at the time. It's a very different world when new Member States have populations with per capita GDP at a third to a half of ours. They were also having discussions about potential numerical limits on migration from within the EU – which everyone else in the EU called 'free movement' not migration, and were puzzled and annoyed as to why the Brits seemingly deliberately muddled the two – and all the stuff that he raised with Merkel. And what, in my Perm Rep shoes, you are trying to do from Brussels with the aid of my legal support is trying to write stuff in response to what had been produced by Open Europe – Mats and Stephen Booth – that alleged that all manner of things were readily doable, would get

agreed by the the other 27, and wouldn't require a treaty change.

And basically you're saying to them – which is not that easy or popular – 'But nearly all of this is untrue'. I mean the Stephen Booth report in the autumn of 2014 was just a classic piece of interesting think tank work which alleged things could be achieved and negotiated within the treaties and legislated at home or at EU level, which anyone who knew the treaties, the Commission and the key member states, knew was not the case. So you think, well, nobody else in the system, least of all the Home Office, can and will write something to this effect, so I basically said in UKREP I'm going to have to write the rebuttal myself of why this is wrong and why it's very dangerous for them to commit to anything much like this in the manifesto because they patently won't be able to deliver it. And then politicians will blame the civil service for not having warned them. As is obvious, I am someone who thinks it's better to get some realities on the table earlier not later. It saves a lot of grief later.

We had a difficult time on that because that was at the time of the Carswell and Reckless defections induced panic about immigration and free movement of people. And Number 10 produced a speech for Cameron in November 2014 to try and calm it down. But all we were trying to do, Tom and I, was to say, 'It's none of our business, you must decide what you want to decide on the shape of immigration policy in a non-Coalition Government, there's plenty you can do to tighten free movement operationally in the way other states already do, but don't allow a manifesto to commit you to a lot of things on curtailing free movement that you're seriously going to regret when you get your renegotiation process, because it will be clear that you can't deliver it.'

And then Tom, as Sherpa, had produced a whole package for the day after the election: 'This is what you said in your manifesto, here's a potential methodology for getting to a set of serious and specific asks and this is what we think it might look like.' We'd had a load of papers, 100+ pages of papers to give Cameron on the morning of 8 May 2015. Making clear that we were, for the reasons I gave you, already short of time, and therefore needed to crystallise very quickly the set of concrete demands he wanted to deliver, if we were to get the negotiation under way with the the slightest serious prospect of getting them.

UKICE: During this period with the big debates about where to go in the longer

term, what did all of this debating about in-out referenda do to UKREP, where you were then Permanent Representative? Were ministers really engaging with the substance of what was going on, because this is a Government that assumed it would have a referendum but then it would win and stay? Was it engaged in the rest of what was going on in Europe?

IR: Yes, not too bad really. I mean obviously for the bulk of UKREP staff, it doesn't make any difference to their daily life in working groups or servicing COREPER (The Permanent Representatives Committee) or dealing with the European Parliament really. And, in a sense, you don't want it to.

Within UKREP both Jon and I over the years were trying to keep people really abreast of it so that they know it's happening, because they can't be oblivious to the fact that there's a much bigger strategic issue lurking behind absolutely everything that they are working on. They can also see the Permanent Representative disappearing back to London rather a lot, and you are sort of double-hatted. So I would disappear back to my capital really far more often than the average Permanent Representative of any other capital.

That's partly a British tradition of going back for a Friday morning set of meetings. But it soon went way beyond that. I mean you had to play a very, very active policy making role from Brussels and so you have to explain to your staff: 'Look, there are occasions when I'm just going to be have to absent the scene pretty often, because there are very important discussions in London and I have to be there for them. I have to go and see the boss,' or 'No, I have to have to attend a morning meeting in Number 10 or teatime meeting in Number 10. It's more important that I do that than I stay here.'

So there was a lot of that going on, but actually the Coalition Government was really pretty attentive to Europe, pretty active at council meetings, fairly normal. Everybody knows it's looming, but until you get to the election nobody knows of course who they're going to face. You're working for a Coalition Government which doesn't feel like a Conservative Government. People aren't really thinking about an in-out referendum and what all that means until after the election. I am personally doing so a great deal, because I think it's quite probably going to happen, but I still have the day job to do, and I am working for a Government that does not support a referendum, not for the Party which does.

After the election, of course, they are also thinking, as am I, that we're heading for a referendum. It might well be lost. We might be then working on what does 'out' look like, and actually doing the renegotiation and nothing else. But you're also thinking as Perm Rep, 'I'm potentially going to end my term of duty running the UK presidency in the second half of 2017, and chairing COREPER most days for 6 months. That requires an incredible mastery of all manner of issues one has not thought that much about, and a good understanding of all the preoccupations of the other 27 round the table. So, I'm spending an awful lot of time recruiting the right people to run a capable, professional, top class presidency for 2017.'

Because you want to get those people in the door in 2015, 2016, so that by the time you are responsible for running the show, the people driving the agendas and chairing all the key groups are totally on top of what we are aiming to do. So, I was assembling the team that was going to run the UK Presidency whilst you're always having to say to them, 'You have to bear in mind I may be selling you a false prospectus here because we might have left the European Union by then.' It's a bit like being a football manager trying to attract star players but unable to say which league they will be playing in by the time they are up to speed.

UKICE: Did you feel the impact of having more activist backbenchers? During Maastricht, Jonathan Faull said that the Fresh Start group was forever popping over to Brussels and asking questions. Did you experience quite a lot of Eurosceptic Tory MPs coming over to see what was going on?

IR: Yes. Yes. And it's quite fine. What I hadn't realised before I did an ambassadorial job, and I'm sure the UKREP one was very different from most other ambassadorial jobs, is of course you get an incredible throughput of ministers.

So Brussels obviously got far more ministers through the door than any other post in the world, and you see Ministers at a time when you're not necessarily relaxed, but you're seeing them for a dinner or for a nightcap or for a breakfast or you're popping in on a breakfast that they're having with your staff. And frankly you have a different type of conversation from the one that you can have with them either in their office or outside the cabinet room.

And they kick off their heels a bit, they're often much more honest, including about their colleagues, and they say some remarkable things to you that they would virtually never say in a London environment. It's quite fascinating really because they obviously feel liberated to say all manner of things that they wouldn't say in a home environment.

I found that really valuable because it gave me more texture, more context, much more colour. It enables you to see much more of the underlying political reality than you often get to see even in very senior Whitehall based roles, because you get to hear what Ministers are actually thinking, outside the kinds of formal meetings in which they inevitably open up less.

And that stuff is valuable because people come out with a whole stream of propositions or prejudices about what really has to happen and how Brexit's got to work and why it's going to be a liberation, or whatever. You would just never get that at home. And, therefore, I felt the UKREP experience just gave me much better grounding on what these people actually thought, why they thought it, what they were reading, what blogs they were reading, who they were listening to, why. It made me gloomier – frankly, I would say just more realistic – than the vast bulk of my London colleagues about where things would end up for Cameron and his team.

But I often felt rather better informed than Jeremy Heywood for example, whose 'feel' on so many domestic issues was legendarily good, but who in my view rarely really 'got' what Brexit was actually about for its most important devotees until he was actually facing trying to implement it. The top of Whitehall was slow in my view to understand not just how much of the British public was thinking, but how a substantial and actually very voluble chunk of the political class was thinking, and why they were thinking it. 'Europe' was always ghettoised in Whitehall, and without being too unkind, my view is that most of the mandarins did not have much clue what was coming. And I thought I did.

So I found it great, to be honest, because it helped me, even in advance of the end of the renegotiation, thinking ahead to the referendum. I wrote Cameron some fairly long piece when I had a bit of spare non-negotiation time over the New Year of 2016 about, 'These are the issues I think that will be on the mind of those who will oppose you, and this is the way they'll play them.' I didn't

predict the £350m on the side of the bus, but I did say, 'They're going to go very heavy indeed on the budgetary net contribution, and this is why. This is how I'd play it if I were them. This is what I would represent it as. Some of it is specious but it's compelling.'

It was a long paper saying, 'I'm just an official but I am thinking ahead to what the referendum will really be about, which basically won't be anything to do with what we're spending all our time currently renegotiating, this is what I think it's actually all about.' It included why they would deliberately confuse a free trade area with a Single Market, when the two are not even remotely the same beast. Again, even now, they are only in the process of experiencing what this actually means. The amazing thing is why were the politicians not doing that much earlier, why were the Spads not doing that, why were they seemingly not able to do that? This was, after all, the issue by which 'their' man would live or die. And Remain never really laid a glove on the argument that the U.K. could have everything it liked about relations with its neighbours – 'free trade' – and dispense with everything it didn't. Which was obvious nonsense.

UKICE: Did Number 10 at that stage think that what they were renegotiating mattered substantively?

IR: I think they did but, if I am honest, I think they were largely wrong. I think they were then, of course, disappointed. And reality dawned very rapidly after the February 2016 Council. Nothing Cameron could have achieved on free movement without a treaty change would ever have got close to the necessary unanimity, and was ever going to bring over those who had decided they they were going to run the campaign for Leave. Within the political team there was always the thought: are Scholar and Rogers blocking us from attempting something more ambitious? That's totally understandable, actually. Any negotiator inevitably looks ahead to how you'd seek to defend where you know pretty well you could end up, and how others would attack it. You see exactly that now with David Frost who has been busy jettisoning multiple U.K. asks off the side of the boat early on, so that when he does not get them, he can say he never tried for them because the only real issues were sovereignty and fish. He benefits politically of course from the reality that the thinner and more meagre economically the outcome – in other words the worse it is both for U.K. manufacturers and major services sectors in which we are very

competitive in European markets – the happier are those who would give him most political trouble if he delivered a much better outcome for the country.

So that's the danger you're in – the idea that, 'These guys just intend to keep this circumscribed, keep this limited, set the bar at a level they believe can be jumped; they've also got the ear of the boss more than we have'. Which frequently we did indeed, because the boss didn't want to go too far down the Fresh Start and Open Europe type tracks. Why not? Because he thought that many of those demands were deliberately setting the bar for 'reform' deliberately at a height they knew he could not jump. He was right there. Many of those demanding fundamental reform were intent on finding 'reforms' which they knew could not conceivably run: that was the entire game for some of them. Not all of them, in fairness. And, of course, we are advising him, 'Don't set out a whole set of demands that are completely unachievable and then be obviously rebuffed on them, because other leaders can't, for their own political reasons, ever give you x or y.'

By the time you issue your full set of demands – which I think took us precisely six months from the election to the famous letter to Donald Tusk in early November 2015 – and you winnow down your demands to what you really want which you think truly bears on the referendum, it's got to be a set of demands where you're going to get a good 90% of it. The difficulty therefore in this renegotiation is you have to calibrate what you ask for, because the moment you visibly ask for things that you fail to get, you're pretty screwed. There's just no such thing as a 'good compromise outcome' in British politics: it's not how it works. You just get massacred for having compromised at all. Equally, you do have to demand stuff which you genuinely believe is of serious and long term consequence, because you cannot just sell desirable legislative changes, as opponents will say 'This could all be reversed within 5 years, or 5 minutes'. As I say, the need for permanent change with treaty status was central for Cameron from the start. Those were our operating instructions: no readily reversible changes will cut it, so don't focus on those. That is why plenty of Whitehall asks got axed.

And, of course, some inside Number 10 hated that: we had people going on about how we had to have fundamental reform of the European Court of Justice or whatever. Of course, I'm whispering in the boss's ear, saying you can demand fundamental reform of the European Court of Justice but you

won't get that in the next 30 years, let alone in the next three months. So, don't ask for things that you haven't got a cat in hell's chance of getting. You're just going to be defeated on it and then everybody's going to say, 'Well, look at that. He asked for that and he didn't get any of it'. But in any case, the sceptics don't actually want 'reform' of the ECJ, they just want it totally removed from British life, so you won't ever satisfy any of them with 'reform' anyway. So, of course, we are the guys responsible for the negotiation and behaving like mandarins saying you've got to be incredibly careful on your asks, as you've got to know that you're going to be able to land a significant proportion of it.

The interesting thing, and I never fully worked this out but I do think it's the residue of the Fiscal Compact Treaty debacle I talked about earlier, was Cameron was actually most interested in Section A of the (final February 2016) document, which was about the Eurozone-Single Market relationship. We spent most of our lives negotiating that, and it was really extremely difficult to do. Tom was brilliant at it and had a huge pedigree from the financial crisis and everything else, a huge knowledge base, and I could supply the Europe and legal nous.

That was the most difficult bit. The most painful bit to negotiate that we spent longest on, and you're always sitting there privately thinking that I don't think anybody in the entire country would care or even notice what we got on this. They wouldn't understand it and they wouldn't care that they didn't. So why are we spending all our lives on something which is genuinely seriously important in terms of making our Union membership viable – why we won't get outvoted or outmanoeuvred or screwed on something which is of vital national interest – when, when it comes to a referendum campaign, all of this stuff is completely bloody incomprehensible to the voters?

And it puzzled me that Cameron and Osborne didn't think that, because you knew that free movement and border control and sovereignty were obviously going to be bigger questions than the relationship between the Eurozone and the Single Market. In a way, it's to their credit of course that they focused on substance more than narrative, as it was serious stuff; and, as we experience what the Eurozone may believe it can inflict on us now we are outside the club, we may regret having paid too little attention to what we could only deliver when within it. Life outside the town walls gives you much less leverage to

avoid being screwed on certain key interests. We are now experiencing precisely that, issue by issue, sector by sector and there are going to be some very nasty shocks – which are not shocks at all to some of us.

Nevertheless, as a political choice facing a referendum, it was never going to be financial sector issues which won the fight. It's another way in which 2011 prefigured – predetermined – the outcome, I think. But on free movement, did they really believe that the package which focused in restricting access to generous benefits would be enough? They said they did, and we were told they had private polling to back it, but it it it always seemed a bit implausible. I thought we might come back to one form or other of wider emergency brake, and have a big crisis over that, and I had a load of private chats with EU officials over potential backstop options, but that crisis moment never came. Had it done so, as I say, I think realistically, that we would have broken off talks for a year or 18 months and resumed, after French and German elections, with the 'big crunch' moment in early 2018. Was that ever politically viable here? Doubt it, to be honest.

UKICE: Why then do you think the Prime Minister placed so much store by this renegotiation? Did he genuinely think people would be impressed and get it wrong, or was it all about Tory MPs rather than the public?

IR: No, it was not just about Tory MPs. Well, let's be clear: he changed his mind a bit from Bloomberg to 2016 in the face of realities and events. So, he started off in Bloomberg – I think we were all in principle supportive of it, but struggled repeatedly to put enough meat in it – by saying: 'This has to be a pan-European reform agenda that other people can get behind.'

So, if you look at the flavour of Bloomberg, and then the flavour of what we went for in the renegotiation, they're just not the same beast. It's more than a bit strange, Bloomberg, let's face it. But, Ed would go on about how it was the most pro-European speech ever given by a British Prime Minister. Jeremy Heywood would frequently say the same. I would say, 'Well, up to a point, Lord Copper.' You know, it's got classic British intergovernmental, outward-looking but pro Single Market themes, but it's quite thin on lots of areas that matter to everyone else. It's obviously pretty anti supranationalism. But they viewed it as a pro-European statement coupled with the commitment to an in-out referendum. Jeremy repeatedly said around Whitehall, 'It's a fantastically

pro-European speech, Bloomberg and people,' by which I think he mostly meant Europeans, 'are not understanding how pro-European it is.' But most of the elites actually read it a classic British Eurosceptic speech, with a veneer of positive sounding guff.

At that stage it was, 'We are going to be in the vanguard of pan-European reform because Europe needs to change.' You remember all the stuff that Llewellyn came out with: 'It's got to have the flexibility of a network, not the rigidity of a bloc'. I never quite understood what this was supposed to mean to non-Brits, and I never met the non-Brit who did either. But that was their spiel, you know, 'We are going to be at the cutting edge. We're going to be transforming it, we're going to be leading Europe, it's all heading to our presidency. We're going to change the whole nature and shape of Europe. It's going to be more flexible, more diverse, more different destinations within Europe, more trade liberalisation internally, externally.' That was the spiel.

Cameron didn't have many gloomy moments – I was there to supply the gloom obviously – but, occasionally in his gloomier moments in the residence or in the car, and he would say to me, 'You know, the more I really talk to these people, the more I think they don't actually much agree with me on that much of it.' And what can you say other than, 'Hmm, yes, I think you've got a bit of a point there really.' I mean: I think they actually often did agree with him on external trade and on issues like the digital Single Market and climate change. But for the rest...? Not really. We inhabited rather a different planet even from the most U.K. friendly states.

So he listened rather better really than many leaders I have worked for. He's very smart. He did his tour around Europe in 2015 after the election and preparing what the renegotiation should involve by asking, 'Why am I doing this? What's it about?' He did that very assiduously. Tom did most of those meetings with him and some of them were obviously rather hilarious and others a non-meeting of minds.

And the more he reflected on that as he approached the renegotiation, the more he thought, 'Well, quite a lot of the agenda that I would actually like to pursue as pan-Europe, they don't support me on. They don't agree with me. So, actually, I want to tilt this more towards British exceptionalism and entrenching British exceptionalism. To demonstrate to the public that we are

not going on the journey that the vast bulk of the others – or at least their political establishments – want to. And I have to make that permanent not reversible, because my party will demand that.’ This is why I keep coming back to the treaty change point, as he thought ‘I have to make that permanent because otherwise my party will spit peas through it and say ‘Well, you’ve got all this blather and it’s just declaratory language and secondary legislation change. But that won’t survive beyond next Monday, and you’ve delivered nothing by way of permanent change which entrenches our completely exceptional position within the European Union.’

So my and Tom’s operating instructions were, ‘You have to get me permanent change, so I can say to the party and the country it is absolutely bulletproof and fireproof – this is permanent. It’s already permanent because it has treaty status. And at the next treaty change, the treaties will be changed to enshrine what we have delivered via the treaty that we’ve lodged at the UN.’

So those were the operating instructions. You’ll remember it all rather dwindled on economic reform and trade liberalisation. And he basically said to me once in the car, ‘We could have a trade agreement with every bloody nation on the planet and it would make no difference to my backbenchers. It doesn’t make any difference, you know, we could have a trade agreement with everywhere – and he was good on trade deals, pushed EU- Canada, EU- Japan, EU- Mercosur and of course TTIP all very hard – it could be a really good agreement, it could be completely and entirely in British interests, and they just won’t care.’ Actually, Ed Llewellyn and Dan Korski and Mats Persson didn’t really agree with him. But I think he was basically right, which is none of that would have made a ha’porth of difference to any of the backbench sentiment, because that wasn’t what it was actually about for those who wanted full-fat Brexit. Nothing he brought back would have persuaded the prime movers that staying was better than leaving. The only ‘reforms’ that might – might – temporarily have reconciled some of the persuadable middle to back staying in, were just reforms for which there was never going to be support by all 28 member states for the requisite institutional changes.

But then you’re trying to probe away with him and say, ‘Well, what is it about really? I can see you want something permanent which you can say has delivered something which permanently changes our status and guarantees that we’re not cantering down the course to ever closer union.’ But I’m

personally a quite deep sceptic about changing the language on ever closer union, as you can imagine, because I knew the treaties and read the treaties and knew the history, and they didn't, really.

You then say to him, 'Well, what does that achieve really?' And he essentially said, 'But it's absolutely totemic.' And so you're saying to him, 'Yeah, I get it's totemic, but – unlike on these financial sector issues – actually you haven't achieved anything that much worth doing. Even if you get a clear commitment in a legal text that we're not bound by ever closer union of our peoples, it has no legal effects flowing from it which demonstrably keep the UK out of things that you want to be out of.'

And he – rightly – said to me, 'You're missing the point. It's absolutely totemic for my party. We have to demonstrate we're not carrying cantering on down the road of ever closer integration.'

UKICE: As you were negotiating all of this, did you for a moment think that it might get to a stage where David Cameron felt he had to walk away and recommend that we left? Because you said in the immediate aftermath of the Fiscal Compact that you thought that this could be pretty terminal, and you said governance reform was absolutely critical for Cameron.

IR: Well, we had various attempts at various stages to work through that scenario. I think one attempt very soon after Jon had left and I had taken over with Jeremy was to say we need to think seriously about leaving and its consequences, and set up a little secretariat in the Cabinet Office about what would that look like. You needed a small set of expert people who could really devote their lives to thinking this through properly. I think Jeremy was against it anyway, but he basically said Clegg would veto. I did talk to Clegg, obviously I know Clegg of old because he knew each other in Brussels in the 90s. And I did say to Clegg, 'I don't think that is against your interest, or for it. I do think it is in your interest that we do more work on exactly what exit would look like and what it would mean, because the more you look at it the more mind bogglingly complex it is going to be.'

Now Clegg was not there. He basically thought the more you look at it and the more you licence that kind of stuff within the Coalition Government system, the more probable it is that we could end up going down that path, which you have

legitimised by exploring it, so he didn't want it done. I said to Jeremy at one stage but I can't even remember which year, let alone which month, 'But why don't you just do it off your own bat? You're the Cabinet Secretary, and you could just say we in the system need to do this work because we now have a very serious possibility that we'll have a majority government that's committed to doing this, and this is one of the outcomes: the system has a duty to be ready.'

But he didn't want to do it. I can quite understand why. I did come back to that after the 2015 election and said, 'But it might help our negotiating hand if it were taken seriously,' and I'd certainly said similar to Cameron at some stage, 'It might help our negotiating hand if you were known to be working up post-Brexit options in the event that your negotiation didn't succeed. Because otherwise they just think that you're going through the motions and you're putting them through this purgatory of this ridiculous renegotiation, and you're going to recommend 'yes' anyway, so what the hell? So, you have to keep them nervous. You might recommend no.'

But we didn't get very far on that. I do think we should have put more work into that. It's very similar to what May faced, We had essentially the same conversation with May in the autumn of 2016. And I imagine it's very similar to the conversation David Frost has had with Boris Johnson: if people think that it's absolutely guaranteed that you're not going to walk out or you're not going to recommend walking out, then obviously they can call your bluff, can't they? Of course, let's be honest: at no stage has the EU truly believed that any of them would walk from their respective negotiations, because it seemed such a self evidently ruinous thing to do, if you are sitting in any other capital, that they do not believe we would do it. And you have to say they have been right, haven't they?

UKICE: Were you surprised at Cameron not pushing for more at the end of that renegotiation?

IR: Not really. Cameron's very sharp. He knew he either went with it at that point, or that if it fell apart, as I say, we were running into French and German elections seasons and it would be the back end of 2017 before we would even get back to the table. Either route has its perils, but it's not obvious why postponing at least 18 months makes anything easier. Some of his political

advisers were: 'But it's got to get better at the February European Council because we've got to have a triumph on the spot.'

And Tom and I are, you know, again, the old mandarin soaks who have to say, 'Yeah, but it isn't going to get better on the spot. It can only now get worse on the spot.' You're playing defence at this point. The text is the text is the text and we've sealed that now with Martin Selmayr. You have to do that two or three weeks in advance. The only danger once it goes to leader level via sherpas is the text gets worse because the rats get at it. The only way to stop the rats getting at it is for people like Selmayr to be totally on board with our text and just hammering these people.

Martin was brilliant at that, because he's a clever guy. At the sherpa meeting all manner of people who'd never seen this text before came in and said, 'Well, this is pretty appalling. Why on earth have you given the British that...? What? Where's this come from? This is outrageous.' And there were plenty of those around the table at the sherpas, and Martin just sort of dispatched them with a machine gun. And that's what you're doing at that point which was, you know, the Commission and the Council have got to come in and say, 'Forget it: we've stitched this deal with the British. Just get it to your leader and say 'Yes' basically. That's how the game works.' There's this great British myth which gets repeated by most U.K. politicians who understand virtually nothing about the EU – that the leaders will sweep in at the end and, driven by mercantile interests or whatever, will deliver you better, softer, more generous deal than the ayatollahs and legal beagles of Brussels. It's actually almost always the other way round. The people at the centre have to find the deal and will always push the envelope to try and get one. Leaders and their advisers will be more intransigent and harder line. They have domestic politics too, and it's tougher for them to accommodate the kinds of asks we had.

We have just seen the same again now we are out. I'm fascinated by what David Frost said to the boss before that December Von der Leyen dinner which went so badly. I think they carried on believing till near the end that leaders would undermine or disown Barnier and give them more. Was never going to happen. But you're not going to move forward at this point in the negotiation, you're only going to go avoid going backward. And they didn't manage that, either. They really got salami sliced pretty badly. They then had to sell as a great triumph texts on the Protocol and the TCA which even their supporters

are in the process of disowning just a few weeks later. The opponents don't bother about really reading and understanding the text until someone points out to them that there is some outrage or other in it. It's how our politics works.

I think the Government side were pretty well demolished on the February 2016 deal inside the party well before we got to the February Council, because the moment it hit the streets the Eurosceptics and the ERG were ready with their demolition of, 'Call this a serious change? This is just ridiculous.' It's obvious by the day of the deal itself that Michael Gove, for example, is not on board.

UKICE: A 'polished turd', wasn't it?

IR: Yes. It was dead on arrival, and you could see that from Brussels, and I'm saying it in Brussels anyway, where people are incidentally congratulating me and saying, 'Fantastic job, you're now bound to win the referendum.' And you say, 'Look, I tell you, the referendum is really going to be absolutely nothing to do with any of this, and I know you're going to hate me for saying that because we just spent months of all our lives negotiating this thing. But believe you me, this thing is not going to be the thing that wins the referendum, and they'll drop it dead.'

And Martin, amongst others, really objected to that, and he objected to that vis-à-vis Cameron, but above all vis-à-vis Theresa May with whom we spent the last painful days before the text emerged, trying to get her main issues dealt with through Olly Robbins, her main Home Office civil servant at that point and it was utterly painful. And we delivered them, and Martin is saying to us, 'This is really pushing us into doing stuff which we shouldn't be doing via this renegotiation anyway. Please just give me a guarantee that this woman is now going to come out vehemently in support of this deal afterwards.' So you're saying, 'Of course, Martin, don't worry. Theresa, utterly sound. She's going to come out fervently in support of it.'

And, of course, she didn't. She made one rather careful speech in the April, which explained why Remain kept the country safer on policing and counter-terrorism, but was studiously sceptic in tone, to maximise her leadership chances should the opportunity just happen to arise. And Martin really objected to that – and felt 'We put all this effort in, we bent over backwards to give you various things that we didn't want to give you. Some were first order, some

were second order things. We insert it all in the text, and then your bloody Home Secretary doesn't really come out and support any of it anyway.' The residue of this of course explains quite a lot of the behaviour we then saw from the Commission at various key moments for her in 2017 and 2018.

In a sense, I'd almost switched off by the February Council. We had to nail various things with the Poles and others at that point, on the exportability and rates of child benefit and various other benefit things. But by then you could see whatever we got in the package was not going to be key to winning the referendum. The referendum just wasn't going to be about that and the package was going to be largely forgotten. Obviously, had we won the referendum, then I would have then spent the bulk of the UK presidency trying to get the package stitched in to EU legislation and sorting it out, and we would have had a devil's own job preventing rats getting at it in 2017. So it's importance really inevitably depended entirely on whether the referendum was won. But you knew that it would play no serious role between February and June 2016 really.

The aftermath of the referendum

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): What were your immediate reactions and priorities after you'd heard the results of the referendum?

Ivan Rogers (IR): Well, I stayed in Brussels and watched it on the internet at home, and I worked out pretty early on that it was going to be a no vote. I mean I had been saying to people, 'I think it's genuinely 50-50,' which I think most of them still didn't believe till the day, despite the polling. I was a lot more cautious than what their bosses persistently heard from Number 10. I kept on telling people that outside metropolitan Britain, Leave obviously had a serious lead.

There was a general affairs council in Luxembourg so I had to discuss with David Lidington which of us was going to do that. I basically said I don't really want to be in Luxembourg if there was a no vote because I'm in the wrong place and I need to be dealing with the key people here in Brussels at the top of the Council, top of the Commission. So he did that.

You do an all-staff meeting early on saying, 'We are where we are. We're leaving. I can't tell you yet what any of that means.'

I'd said to my top few staff before the referendum, in the week before that if it's lost, we should assume Cameron would go very quickly. That he would presumably come to the European Council the next week on 29 June. That he would have no authority then to say anything on behalf of those who would follow. That it would all be rather painful for him in those circumstances and for all of us, but we must do our best to keep him really well served, keep up appearances, do the right thing. 'Things will move very fast on the other side in terms of preparation of the negotiation. We can't do very much of that with Cameron, but I think he'll have resigned by then. And then we'll just have to see who we get, but we'll now have a hiatus at home.'

What are you trying to do with the staff is say to them, 'Look, we're in a different world but you guys are easily the biggest collection of expertise that Whitehall has on the European Union, so we need you. And we'll need you for the renegotiation process.'

I don't think, to be honest, that's really what happened under Tim (Barrow) or under Olly, that's quite difficult territory, but it became very difficult very early on with Olly and with the top of Whitehall, and with Theresa May and her political entourage in all honesty.

That's a delicate question, and I haven't said much on the record, and I don't intend to. But the sense is that UKREP people, by dint of being UKREP people, me included, were 'contaminated' by their excessive European expertise. That sense was great, I'd say.

So you're trying to reassure people most of whom, after all, at the senior or middle ranking level, had come in order to run a presidency in 2017. Therefore, they are just seeing one of the most interesting jobs of their life blow up. You're saying, 'It's all very uncertain. But you are in a great position. This is going to be the most important negotiation the country has conducted in several generations. It's going to be incredibly difficult, but it will be exciting beyond most things you will ever get to do in your careers as officials. You've got a lot of the expertise. We're desperately going to need you. I will fight for you in Whitehall and in London and with ministers.'

Then you're saying to people behind the microphone in working groups, 'Say less, say it with the right tone. Say it with due humility. Don't speak too much about what the UK must demand on dossier X, Y and Z, because we're not in that world anymore, so don't make yourself look ridiculous. Keep your firm friendships and good working relations with all the other people around the table who will be feeling rather sorry for you, but also wondering why the hell you're taking the microphone at much length given you're about to leave. I'll now be back in London a hell of a lot whilst we try and work out who we get next and how we're going to prepare the process for that, and I'll try and keep you abreast of that.'

You're basically just trying to keep the UKREP show on the road in July 2016, spending a lot of your time in London with senior officials and with ministers. I had various pretty extraordinary meetings. Not stuff I want to go into detail on.

I thought a lot about whether it might be better to exit, and leave it solely to people who had no background in the previous five years, let alone plenty of the previous 25. And the consistent message to me was, 'No, absolutely not. You've got to stay. You're the key person who knows all about it. You're the only one we have left who does know all about it. So, you know, got to have you there and have you there for the duration.' I said, 'If you ever change your mind on that, or feel that I'm contaminated goods or the object of vilification, and it's a problem, just let me know.' And if you are me, you also think that these people are going to tread on any number of booby traps if I don't tell them where they are and why they are being laid.

You're having all kinds of conversations in July but you're trying to keep all the staff by saying, 'Come back after the summer and we will get some more clarity about how it's going to run, where UKREP fits, what's our role, how the process is working. And I'm going to fight for you to be very heavily embedded in all stages of this process.' That's all you can promise really.

The one thing I have said publicly is that I did say, 'If you cannot work for a Brexit government committed to Brexit and getting Brexit done because it's against your personal wishes, then either resign from the civil service altogether or resign from UKREP. Absolutely fine by me, and go and do another job in your department or elsewhere. We'll help. But don't stay and be completely miserable on something which you think is fundamentally the

wrong thing to do. Because we've got to have everybody now facing the direction of 'We're going to deliver the best possible Brexit for the country.'

UKICE: In that hiatus between David Cameron standing down and the leadership contest potentially going on until September, bringing in Olly Robbins to replace Tom and things like that, was any useful work done before Theresa May became Prime Minister?

IR: Yes, we had a big programme of work, but it was very unfortunate for Olly really. I don't think it would have been Olly in circumstances where we'd stayed. Pretty sure of that. But Tom had been appointed Treasury Permanent Secretary, and there was no obvious top level EU literate person in the FCO who could have been a sherpa for Theresa May or Andrea Leadsom, let's be honest.

Olly was close to Jeremy. So I think that was clearly Jeremy's idea, but Olly had been working anyway for Theresa May as Second Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, so had established himself with her. So, was the obvious choice. I mean, who else had you got at that point? The difficulty for him, and it was an immense difficulty, was that he's a very able man but he just didn't know a lot about it because he hadn't really worked on the European Union for 17 years. I said to Jeremy, and we had some quite good conversations before they became rather difficult conversations through most of the autumn:

'Look, this is comfortably the most difficult job for anybody in the entire system. And the bloke hasn't got deep background, hasn't got experience. And we've ended up with DExEU. You've put him in a position where he's Permanent Secretary of a department and having to build a totally new department afresh, as well as Sherpa. You simply can't do both, and the only job that actually matters, I'm afraid, is the Sherpa job, because you've got to be known and trusted and rated and liked around the Sherpa network and got to be very visible around that network, which means a huge amount of travelling. And you can't run the department at the same time. And you're going to have a Chinese walls problem because he can't simultaneously do all the DExEU business for David Davis, and work personally for the Prime Minister, because there are going to be occasions where I'm afraid he's going to have to say things to the Prime Minister which he picks up from his Sherpa net that he never wants to divulge to David Davis, and which are pure leader to

leader stuff. And Davis is going to feel marginalised and betrayed by that. So you are setting him up to fail, and you are going to have severe problems between no 10, DEXEU and the FCO.'

I'm afraid I think I was right about all of that stuff, and nobody was listening, including Jeremy. I said it's just not going to work. It's a disastrous set up to have DEXEU, because what happened in UKREP to be clear, and it happened very rapidly, was that the moment you had DEXEU there, you could see the tension.

The formation of the May Government

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): How did the relationship between DEXEU and UKREP work?

Ivan Rogers (IR): Yes. Well, it got announced as a structure and with the Cabinet appointments at a time when we were doing leaving dinners for various Perm Reps, and I was the butt of the much hilarity of, 'You're working both for the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for DEXEU.' My colleagues thought it was absolutely hilarious because any foreigner could see it wasn't going to work and that it would cause disharmony in London, to their collective advantage. Which it duly did. They thought it was incredibly amusing that we'd ended up with both Boris Johnson and David Davis and that I was reporting to both.

But then beneath that in UKREP – and it happened incredibly fast and showed how Whitehall really works – the Cabinet Office machine, whether you like it or not, sort of is trusted, and the head of EGIS (Europe and Global Issues Secretariat) is trusted because they're the neutral umpire as well as the advisor to the Prime Minister, and they're going direct to the PM in person. But they have convening power and adjudicating power, and they don't always have a particular position on particular dossiers. They depend on engendering trust across the system in their own brokering.

As soon as you had DEXEU there, and Davis there, every spending department, every negotiating department basically clammed up on DEXEU. And UKREP actually knew far more what their position was than DEXEU ever did because people started thinking, 'Well, I'm going to cut DEXEU out of the

process completely.'

And I don't think that kind of stuff comes naturally to Jeremy, and it wouldn't to Mark Sedwill either. If you haven't lived that and lived EGIS and the coordination process, as soon as you remove the Cabinet Office and put a department in charge, and a Secretary of State in charge, departments just cease to trust the integrity of the system, and they think, 'I'm not working with that. I'm just going to go direct to the Prime Minister or into the Cabinet Office on the things that matter and I'm going to cut Davis and his lot out of the process.' Because they are not in any sense neutral. They are *parti pris*, and their position is just Davis's position. And who cares about Davis's position? He is just one Secretary of State, and he's not the PM's man.

UKICE: There were certainly reports written before the creation of DExEU saying do not create a separate department, it will be a disaster area.

IR: Completely insane. So, obviously, I couldn't reverse that. I did say to Jeremy, 'How the hell has this happened? This is a ridiculous idea. If you needed a minister it absolutely needed to be a Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. It's completely bloody obvious.'

He said to me, 'I tried to sell it to her. She simply wouldn't have it, she hates the Cabinet Office.' I said, 'She hates the Cabinet Office because it used to be occupied by David Cameron and Ed Llewellyn and staff she and Nick believed were undermining her and she thought were useless anyway.'

I had some sympathy with her there, frankly. But given that the Cabinet Office was now her machine, use it. Don't set up a line ministry for Brexit which will start to depart from what No. 10 actually wants and which will split your sherpa down the middle and ruin his relationship with 'his' Secretary of State.

But this was done. DIT (Department for International Trade), a similarly bad idea, was created, and we were where we were. We did have a process, in the interregnum before a new PM appeared but we obviously thought it was going to last until September. Olly was running himself in. Jeremy said to me perfectly reasonably, 'Your job is knowledge transfer at express speed to this guy to get him up to speed. Get him known with everybody. Download over dinners in Brussels, dinners in London, whatever you want to do, download

everything you know to enable him to get up and running.’

And I said, ‘Done. That’s what I’ll do. He can spend as much time with me anywhere he likes, and I’ll download what I think is going on on the other side, why, and how I think we should think about the exit process in the light of what others will try and force us to do.’ I did this very well with Tom. Jon and I also made it work very well.

So the deal I had struck with Jon was, ‘You don’t need to download to anybody else – not to a roomful of people – but you do need to download to me. And if you want to do that from the car or on your way in,’ because he lived out in outer Brussels, ‘or in the evening or whatever. If you don’t want to divulge it to anybody else, it won’t be divulged. If you want your private secretary to do it for me that’s fine. We just need a system where I know what conversations you’re having and what you’ve said and what’s been said to you. And you know exactly what conversations I’ve been having.’

Because that’s the only way you can make the Sherpa-Perm Rep tandem work. It is the key tandem and the Minister for Europe, however good, I’m afraid, only counts on these things intermittently. And is obviously vastly more important on the Parliamentary side. The key official tandem has to be talking to each other five to ten times a day, and you have to be doing it in real time and you have to be picking up what intelligence you’re getting on your network and match the intelligence they’re getting on their network. And it has to be a hugely trusting relationship. Because the other thing it needs is good “burden sharing”. One of you can’t be the purveyor of all the bad news, while the other gets to transmit all the good tidings. There has to be equity there, or the one who delivers the bad news isn’t going to last. You have to dovetail very well.

This was, maybe inevitably, much tougher to get working with Olly than with Jon or Tom. He had a securocrat approach to working; he surrounded himself with a really large private office; the comms to DExEU beneath him were not great, to be honest, and the comms to UKREP never functioned well. I tried various ruses of getting close to the people in his office to saying to them, ‘You just have to tell me what he’s up to and where his head’s at’, because I had to understand where he is in order to have the right conversations for his benefit in Brussels, even if it’s only to relay back to him, ‘Yeah, I know you think that, but I don’t think it’s quite like that. I think it’s more like this.’

Because that's what you actually most need from the Perm Rep. Because the clue is in the name. The Perm Rep is, by definition, the one having most conversations of anyone with the folk who count on the EU side.

UKICE: So what was going on formally in that period when Theresa May came in and had to start deciding what Brexit meant, other than Brexit? What processes were being set up there for deciding issues?

IR: Well, Olly was in charge of that. As I said, the tough thing for Olly is of course she arrived early because the leadership contest collapsed. Instead of thinking we had until September to get Olly up and running and to produce reams of papers for an incoming Prime Minister, it all got truncated and we had her in July rather than September. So that was bad, I think, and very unfortunate for Olly because he didn't get a long enough running-in period. He then has to be the arbiter of deciding the official process with Jeremy Heywood obviously. The Sherpa has to run the show. It can't be run by the Perm Rep.

He clearly worked out with her very early on that she didn't want a process involving either Boris Johnson or David Davis. She'd appointed these guys in order to appease the party and say, 'I've put Brexiteers in charge of DIT, Liam Fox, Foreign Office, Boris Johnson, DExEU, David Davis.

But she obviously made utterly clear very early on and clearly to Jeremy and to Olly that, 'I don't want any of these people in the room when I actually decide what I want to do. So I want a separate process with you, and it has to involve Olly, Jeremy, Ivan, and Nick (Timothy) and Fi (Hill) and then Peter Storr, and then one or two others.'

Peter was brought over, bluntly, as the HO comfort blanket into Number 10, to run a Number 10 unit on Europe separate from Olly and DExEU. Another dimension of dysfunction. Peter's a really lovely guy, and a smart professional HO official, with loads of EU pedigree on the justice and home affairs side, which his boss understood well.

UKICE: So he was the Europe advisor at the Home Office, wasn't he?

IR: Thoroughly good bloke. And he was trusted by her, liked by her, had a very good manner with her, was well in with the entourage as a capable, trusted

advisor. But outside the world of the JHA, he just didn't know enough really – and he himself would never have suggested otherwise – and he didn't have that network because he wasn't on the Sherpa-Perm Rep network, he was on the JHA network. He did that incredibly well, too. But there can only be one Sherpa. That had to be Olly, not Peter.

So the message was, 'We're going to have weekly meetings in that format, and none of that is going to be open to any cabinet minister. And that will be the real process where I decide what I think, and please give me then your menu of papers each week to go through,' which Olly would obviously draft.

Of course the difficulty for me is: first, you've got to travel back every week, usually at a very inconvenient time and at virtually no notice, when COREPER is going on, to be at those meetings; second, Olly is highly secretive so you would rarely even see the draft of what you were discussing much before the meeting and so you're in the structurally difficult position – and we had lots of toing and froing on that – where you only really get to see the advice just before the meeting. Then, pretty often you think 'I don't really quite agree with that'. But how much do you – can you – say of that in the room? My burden sharing point. I am quite prepared to say stuff week by week that neither the Cabinet Secretary nor the sherpa would, but it's no good if you are consistently the one emitting the warnings of what the 27 are up to and why, if there is no-one backing that view. I am not saying any of that stuff then because it's fun. I am saying it because I have picked it up or worked it out and I am relaying to the main policy-makers at home stuff they absolutely need to have digested before they frame their advice.

I had lots of sessions with Olly and Jeremy saying 'I really don't want to wash our dirty linen in these meetings.' Cameron would have found that immensely amusing, and Osborne, because they liked officials arguing in front of them because that enabled them better to decide what they thought. She rather hated rows between officials in front of her.

So I said to Jeremy, 'You can't constantly put me in a position where I have to openly disagree with the advice that's in print in front of me,' because she would then say, 'Why is that the advice then?' She thinks that officials sort that stuff out before they come into the meeting.

UKICE: Theresa May had been well trained by the Home Office where you only get one viewpoint? So, it's a whole different process.

IR: Yes. She evidently didn't like a discussion in front of her where we actively disagreed with each other. Whereas with Cameron, frequently with both Jon and Tom, we worked out a system where one of us would actually deliberately take one position and the other would take another position. Because that would help them work out what they really thought, and you'd have the policy argument in front of them. Burden sharing again. The trouble is you didn't have very many of those meetings before you reach party conference, and she blew it all out of the water with the notorious Nick Timothy speech.

May's red lines, October 2016 – January 2017

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Were you involved in that conference speech? You call it the Nick Timothy speech?

Ivan Rogers (IR): No, never saw it before. We had two speeches at the party conference, both of which were fatal to her and to the UK, I am afraid. The first of which was the invocation of Article 50 by a certain date, which was on the Sunday before the party conference. We had no intimation of that until the Saturday before, and I was floating down the Danube with Permanent Representative colleagues on a visit to the Slovakian Presidency, drinking champagne, you know, the usual diplomat story.

Olly rings me up in a fair old state saying, 'She's about to announce a date certain for the invocation of Article 50. This is all insane. What do you think we should do?' I said, 'No, you're completely right, it's obviously insane. Reduces her leverage, a completely mad thing to do, but she's presumably under immense party pressure to do it. I think we should fight it and say 'It's really absolutely not in your interest to give them a guaranteed date.'" Because then they think – I had previously said to her in meetings, and said to Nick Timothy – that they'll then just twiddle their thumbs and they think they've completely got you, because they think you're going to go down the Article 50 route. And, therefore, they don't need any pre-negotiation whatever with you about where this thing has got to end up by the end of the 2 years specified in Article 50.

Remember the mantras on the European side, 'No negotiation without notification?' All the time. They just thought, well, no negotiation without notification under Article 50. They indeed set it all out at that June 2016 European Council I mentioned.

So they just think, 'Well, we don't need to do anything now because we don't need to talk to her until she's notified under Article 50.' I said if you want to break that down, you have to keep them on their toes about what exactly you're going to do and when you're going to do it, because that's the only way in which you get to a pre-negotiation about how Article 50 is going to work in a way which suits you and not just them. It's not to guarantee that you're going down that route by a certain day.' That was the only conceivable way to have what Davis later described as the 'battle of the summer' on sequencing. He didn't apparently notice that the U.K. had lost the battle before it started because his friends on the right had forced her hand and thus gave the EU total control over the process. Olly tried that weekend, but it was obviously too late by then because she'd obviously decided and told the party apparatchiks and her colleagues that she was going to do it. None of them saw the folly of the course.

Then the second speech, the party conference speech, was just ridiculous. There was actually also Amber Rudd's speech on migration control. Which really ignited strongly anti U.K. feeling.

Amber Rudd told me at a JHA council, because I don't know Amber very well but I then sat alongside her for a couple of JHA councils. And she told me rather remarkably that it wasn't actually her idea and that she opposed some of the key content, and that Nick and Fi(ona) Hill had told her she had to say it. You slightly feel like saying, 'Why didn't you just say 'I'm not going to'? Its my party conference speech, I have no intention of saying that.' The worst speech of all was May's own leader's speech, which set out red lines, some of which she patently did not understand the import of when saying them, including on issues her internal process had not, by that point, even discussed. The single daftest speech given by any British PM since the war, in my view.

So we had three disastrous speeches, and that's the point at which my relationship with them all starts to deteriorate because you obviously have to go back and see her between the party conference speech and her first

European Council several days later, and you can't duck telling her that the reception amongst everyone I talk to is pretty icy. Putting it mildly. Bear in mind she hasn't yet met most of these people – her fellow leaders – and hasn't ever been to a European Council. The European Council is in mid October.

She knew that I would send a long 'scene setter' because she'd seen side copies of all the ones I sent to Cameron before. She said to me she liked those and liked the methodology that I'd used with Cameron, which was rather different from previous Perm Reps and from Jon's style. And I would do deliberately long minutes, which for Cameron were the key thing he read before any European Council because it would aim give him all the 'moving parts' in one paper.

I would say, 'This is what's going on in the room. This is where other people are, and this is why they are where they are. This is what I predict will happen procedurally, and what's on other people's minds. This is what I think you should be thinking of doing.' That would often run to eight or ten pages which is rather classic Rogers' style but very different from previous Perm Reps. But you are trying to give them, 'This is what you're walking into. This is what it's going to feel like. This is what I'm picking up on my net. This is where I scent trouble/ ambushes/ whatever. This is where the media are at in my part of the world. These are the stories they are hunting. This is what I've just been asked at my press conference,' because one of my blow ups with Nick and Fi was over what I had said at press conferences in advance of that Council, and that was all pretty grim and equally catastrophic in December.

They asked me why I was even doing a presser, and I said, 'Every major Perm Rep and the Sec Gen of the council and the Sec Gen of the Commission gives a press conference before every European Council, and you just have to decide. I'm absolutely happy to stop doing these things but it will be noticed. And the media will write their stories based on what everyone else is briefing. About 100-150 people will always attend my press conferences, and I will give them the party line about what we're up to. You can write the party line about what we're up to, and I can promise to deliver it verbatim but I can't just respond to questions by saying 'I refer the right honourable gentleman to the reply I gave earlier'.

I have to answer some questions, I can't just say, 'Well, I have really nothing

further to add to what I told you in my opening statement.' There's no point in my doing that. It's bad for you too, if I did.

But what am I saying to her in advance of the Council is precisely what gets leaked two months later in advance of her second Council. Which is, 'They're really surprised by your party conference speech. This indicates to the key figures in the beltway that you're going much further out of the European Union than they'd expected. You're going further out than Norway or Switzerland and, arguably, even Turkey, which has a customs union. They think the only thing left which is compatible with your speech is a rather skinny free trade agreement. Everything deeper – and better for two way trade in both goods and services – is just ruled out by what you have red lined. And the negotiation of this deal could only start after U.K. withdrawal had happened, and it might then take a couple of years to negotiate and another year or two to ratify. That would take us into the early to mid 2020s to have a full deal.

This is the stuff which of course at that time, when the fantasists – in and outside Cabinet – were still talking about leaving, and with a full trade deal in place with the EU, and loads of other non-EU states, within months, was just dynamite and led to, 'This character is saying it could take several years.' Which then publicly turned into ten years, which I never said. But what I did say is, 'They, the best experts I know and talk to around town, are saying it'll be a relatively very thin free trade agreement if all your red lines stick. The free trade agreement won't even start to be negotiated until after the end of the Article 50 negotiation. A thin agreement is harder to negotiate than a thick agreement because the thicker it is and the closer you remain to the Single Market, the shorter it is. Norway short; Canada long. And therefore it might take even some years to negotiate, and then it would be a mixed agreement which means that national Parliaments as well as the European Parliament might have to ratify it. Which is a nightmare.

I didn't say 'mixed agreement' because it wouldn't have meant anything to her, but it would be a ratification process, which might involve member state parliaments as well as the European Parliament and our Parliament, and therefore it might be the early to mid-2020s before any of this stuff formally comes into force. And so you'd also have to have a transition bridge from the point of exit until then; and, during that transition, you'd be really pretty stuffed. Still paying, still obeying, no voice. Not that I said it quite in those words. But of

course that is exactly where we ended up. It was just sacrilege to mention it as a possibility that autumn. I was told that this was all the 'binary thinking of the past' and we were going to get a unique, bespoke agreement, unlike any the EU had ever done. Well, not with your position, you aren't...

I did hum and haw about whether to send any of this in print to her, and I hummed and hawed openly with my office. I thought, in the end, you just have to say it. I mean I'd heard it from Jean-Claude Juncker, who personally said to me, 'I've read her speech three times and it's really quite remarkable. It's just extraordinary that she should say such a thing in a party conference speech; why has she done that, before she has even come to Brussels and even met most of her new opposite numbers?' I had conversations with Donald Tusk, with whom I got on well, and with Tusk's people and with people like Jeppe Tranholm-Mikkelsen and other old mates.

I had said to Jeppe, the day after the referendum, but we'd been discussing it well before the referendum. 'If we go out, we'll obviously go a really long way out, mid-Atlantic, and it'll be at most a skinny free trade agreement, because we'll obviously leave the single market and the customs union.' We talked even then about the need, in that scenario for a very good trade facilitation agreement. Otherwise, people would just drown in red tape. And well, here we are...

And Jeppe was probably, as a Dane, the guy who always understood the dynamics and the outcome of this best. Jeppe said: 'If you leave, you are indeed going a long way out, and most of the European elites are just not ready for that because they think that that's obvious insanity and you won't do it, when you actually really think about it. Whereas I (Jeppe) think you will have to do it because you'll have to leave Single Market and customs union because there's no other way to do it, if it's about free movement, borders, the ECJ and trade policy sovereignty.'

UKICE: You said that most of Europe assumed we'd stay close. Were they actually doing detailed thinking about what they wanted out of this?

IR: No. Not really. Not sure they ever really did at any point either. Big issue with the way the EU works. It's very processy and driven by the key people in the Council and the Commission. And all old colleagues of mine, whom I know

well, so I knew exactly what they were going to do on 29 June. I knew what they would say in those European Council conclusions. I'd warned Cameron that they were going to do so: not much – well, nothing – you could do about it. I said they're ready with what they're going to do and how they're going to run it and where they're going to try and take the Article 50 process.

They had their shibboleths written down in the 29 June European Council conclusions. Jeppe had those in his top drawer well before the referendum. They were ready.

They're very clever guys. I have a huge amount of time for Jeppe in particular, but he had some excellent policy people around him and some very good lawyers around him. Same applies in the Commission. They knew exactly where they wanted to go on process. They wanted to do 'no negotiation without notification'. It's obvious why. They were very worried about us driving a wedge. They're obviously very worried about the integrity of the entire project under a potentially existential threat; they were heading towards the kind of Bratislava Declaration of what the 27 were going to do under the Slovak Presidency and beyond. That's why we'd been floating down the Danube when Olly got me for that call before the first conference speech.

They knew exactly what they needed to say by way of processology in June, and they did it again of course in October and December, setting out where they were going to try and force the Brits to go and how the process was going to work. So unlike domestic Whitehall, let alone Westminster, you can see what they are going to try to do, exactly what I would do if I were them, and how I would play the Brits, both within the Article 50 process and subsequently. It's a fascinating part of the experience of doing the job really, you're trying to explain to Whitehall and to senior Ministers, this is how they think about it, this is what they're going to try and do. This is where they think the UK is weak. This is how they intend to dictate events and the sequencing of Article 50.

Those June European Council conclusions were in key people's heads well before the referendum, and Jeppe was ready with that, and he was ready to be telling the other Perm Reps that on the morning of 24 June. They had a plan ready to go for the European Council on 29 June. Read those European Council conclusions. Virtually everything that's happened since you could derive from the decisions they took in the first few days. They dictated the play

for the withdrawal agreement; they repeated the success for the trade and co-operation deal. At every stage, the U.K. has been batting last on a wicket taking a lot of spin.

The difficulty is in relaying this kind of stuff back to people in London, is that with all respect to them, they just didn't know which game it was, let alone how the game worked and what the other side was intending to do. And you're trying to relate back quite difficult, unwelcome messages about what their game plan is.

UKICE: Why was there so much pushback against some of your warnings about what it would look like? Was it just a visceral pushback in your view?

IR: Oh, I think if I could have got to her. I was very encouraged by early on, before the leadership campaign, because May really wanted to know exactly what Article 50 was and how I thought it would work – how I saw it running. And she asked very sensible, intelligent questions and I thought 'This is a good sign.' Because she's listening to what I say and how I think it'll work and what the others will be up to in the event that she wins. She asked good questions and I thought that's a sign of someone aware that it's a dangerous old game with a lot of bear traps.

If we could have carried on doing that in open session in September-October, with me able really to set it out as I saw it in front of her ... then you never know. You have a chance properly to chew the fat on how to try and play this, and to acquaint her with how others are going to use their leverage. With Nick Timothy, I think he just wanted to keep my advice away from her. Not just mine. It was a paranoid regime about most senior officials on everything. And I said, 'Look, if any of this stuff is too sensitive to put in print, I can come and say it in person. If I do put it in print, you can tell me what the copy list is and it'll be copied to as narrow a group of people as you like.'

Basically I said to him, as I said in previous incarnations to Cameron's team, 'If you want to write on top of it that this is just the bloke in Brussels who sees things from 250 miles away but he doesn't remotely understand what you're facing inside the party or whatever, that's absolutely fine by me, that's your prerogative, you're the Chief of Staff: I am a diplomat a long way away. No problem at all. And you may well be completely right. But there is a perspective

on what's going on in Brussels and how I see it from Brussels and what I think what the others are up to in Brussels and around capitals and how they're thinking about it that I think she really needs to know. If you want to then say 'That's an interesting perspective but it's not the key perspective, and the key perspective is that...' fine. And if she says to me personally, 'I've heard all that and it's all very interesting but I don't agree and I want you to do that,' then I'll go and do 'that' instead. But I do want her to see it. '

But Nick and Fi wanted to operate as kind of gatekeepers, a praetorian guard to keep unwelcome official advice away from her and keep officials away except in highly controlled environments. In the end, they succeeded very well but I am afraid it contributed to her demise, I think.

I do think I might have got somewhere with her in quite frank one-on-one discussions. When you could get her to sort of kick her shoes off in Rue Ducale, I actually found you could get to a place with her where you'd say, 'Yes, I know, Home Secretary, I know that's what you want and that's what you think but let's just...'

You get to a bit more of a point where you'd shoot the breeze with her. It would take a while to break the formality down. You'd kick the junior and middle-ranking officials out of the room and you would do it on your own and say, 'I just want to lodge two or three things with you that you need to think about for tomorrow.'

If we could have got there, as I say, she would obviously have disagreed with certain bits of it – maybe lots of it – but you're not trying to do this as a hostile act. 'I'm just picking up stuff that I think is what is really going on and this is the way the 27 are thinking about it and the Commission's thinking about it. I think you've got to know this is the way they're approaching the entire exercise.'

UKICE: Why did you finally decide it wasn't worth going on?

IR: Well, really when you're briefed against by your own side. As I say, the 14 October minute that I sent to her – or at least some key paragraphs in it – got leaked to Laura Kuenssberg before the 15 December European Council. I know because Laura rang me up the night before that Council to warn me that

it was coming and say that I was going to run as the lead item the following day on all news bulletins, and they'd got hold of an explosive minute from me. This was all a voicemail, she quoted a chunk of the minute, which was a slightly bizarre thing to do, and I thought ah, right, so that's basically Paragraph 6 of the 14 October minute. I knew straightaway what text she had been given.

I then had some toing and froing that evening and I checked in with some other friendly journalists. They were universally of the view that the Number 10 bunker had decided on their story for the following day, and that story was me.

The following morning, at the Council, with the BBC on a sort of permanent loop about 'Gloomy mandarin Sir Ivan' saying it all might take up to a decade, I had four Permanent Representative colleagues including the German and the Dutch approach me. Because they're all watching this rolling BBC News, I'm the lead item on it going into the European Council in December. And there's me, slow motion, getting out of the car, standing well away from her so that I wasn't in the limelight doing the usual stuff of carrying the red box or whatever.

You've been made into the story and, as I say, four colleagues came up to me even before the European Council started saying, 'They've just stabbed you in the back, haven't they?' Well, when your colleagues say that to you, you think: time to go.

I saw it happen to other colleagues in different fashion at various times, including a good friend of mine, Stefano Sannino who was excellent as the Italian Perm Rep and had been a senior Commission official and was stabbed in the back publicly by a particular Italian Prime Minister. When you reach that point, it's just much better to go, isn't it?

UKICE: Then you sent your email on the 2 or 3 January.

IR: Yes. I spent quite a bit of Christmas writing it and rewriting it, so you can imagine I was thinking what do I want to say. Because I really wanted to go back to Brussels to explain to my staff why I was quitting. I wanted to do it in person in front of them, but I checked how many people were going to be there in the first week of the year and it was about 20 or 25 out of our staff of 150. So you think, am I going to trudge all the way from Dorset, where I was on holiday, to London to Brussels to go and address an empty room of people? No point in

doing that.

So I thought I'll do it in absentia and send it out.

UKICE: You must have been aware that it would probably get out and be published when it was?

IR: It never occurred to me that the whole thing would be published. I said to my wife it would be an item on the news but in the end, who cares? One bureaucrat disappears, whom nobody has ever heard of, another one arrives, to whom the same applies. Its not going to be that big. It's just not interesting for any normal person. So I thought my departure would run on the 6pm and 10pm bulletins and then disappear, but it basically lasted the whole week. So I misjudged the volume of it. I thought it was a kind of one-day wonder before a bureaucrat nobody's heard of quits. And I couldn't have been more wrong. It went on for days, and it went global. And it obviously reverberated in capitals, not just London. Strange, really. And no, I didn't expect it to leak as quickly as it did. I've got my ideas about who leaked it where, but I know that the *FT* rang up Number 10 for a reaction.

It was hilarious really. They said, 'The Perm Rep is resigning,' and nobody in Whitehall knew.

I'd just sent a fairly careful letter to Jeremy, as you can imagine. And he was still in the air, and he obviously only got back from Cuba on holiday to find that the whole bloody thing had exploded, and nobody in Whitehall knew that I'd gone. It was only UKREP staff because I'd directed it solely to UKREP staff, because I owed it to the people working for me. I didn't want them to only hear it from the media or hear it from Whitehall.

So I'd rung up my wonderful private office, I'd not told them either, and that was gory, as you can imagine, because you're ringing them up and saying, 'Look, quite bad news for you. I'm sorry to tell you this suddenly now but I didn't want to tell you it over Christmas, because then there'd be a public inquiry afterwards as to why you hadn't told the Cabinet Secretary or anybody else that I was going to do it. So I didn't want to put you in that position.'

It was all a bit grim. What else can you do when you're at the point? I'd

thought about quitting a few weeks earlier because I can see she's put herself in a simply impossible position, and yet your own top colleagues don't get why it's a fatal error of judgment. But why would you ever want to quit, as long as you think you can make any material difference for the better for the country's negotiating position? She of course then spent practically the following 18 months either side of the election, up until Chequers, trying inch by inch to undo some of the worst consequences of having impaled herself on the ridiculous hooks of that Conference speech. But every inch she moved of course just cost her more with the Party. And though they wanted to remove her from early on in the process as she started inching away from the speech, they always had to blame the courtiers, primarily Olly, for the errors, and not the queen herself. I knew she was going to give the Lancaster House speech early in January. I think I changed the timing of the Lancaster House speech because the plan had been to do that a couple of days after I resigned, but it was then impossible until the week after.

I had said to Jeremy after the October speech, 'You just have no idea how bad this is. This is a disaster in Brussels and around capitals. What she's done is a fatal error and she's now put herself in an incredibly weak negotiating position, both with the guarantee by a date certain of invocation of Article 50 and then with these red lines, which are unobtainable, and which she is going to end up bitterly regretting having put in such blunt terms.'

Then of course he's doing the usual Jeremy thing of exhorting, 'Everybody carry on and sooner or later they'll all sober up a bit in the face of reality.' You remember, the classic Jeremy response of course is, 'We can't rush our fences, otherwise we won't be in the room at all and it'll all just be Nick and Fi, and sooner or later, reality will dawn even on these people.' And, of course, I'm saying, 'Yeah, but it's much worse than that actually. She's just blown herself up, she just doesn't know it yet.'

I think at that point you could see the reaction to what I was then saying, and select committees after my resignation thought I was exaggerating. But let's be honest: it was just the most ridiculous negotiating strategy error. Obviously, I had lots of discussion at home because I had actually thought at the time of the referendum and afterwards, 'Oh Goodness, I'm now actually here for many years because they're going to need me to do the bloody negotiation and I'm going to have to stay until 2020 or 2021 before this thing finishes.'

Because I assumed the trade negotiation would take a couple of years after March 2019, which would be the end of the Article 50 process. As it turned out, right overall duration, different route map. So I might be here in Brussels forever.'

And I was completely up for that, but you think you're only up for working practically every hour that God sends if the people who most count are listening, and you think you have a role you can actually fulfill. That autumn was just extraordinary, I never had a weekend off. I never even had a day off at a weekend. I came back to London 27 or 28 times in 17 weeks. It's absolutely knacker. You're working all the time. But you're totally up for doing that if you think anybody's listening to your advice.

UKICE: Do you think that the position that was established at the culmination of the party conference and Lancaster House was irrecoverable from then? Then we had the row about sequencing.

IR: As I said, sequencing was the so-called 'fight of the summer' from David Davis and I obviously had many jocular meetings with David Davis in the autumn of 2016 and told him it wasn't going to be quite like how he assumed. I didn't tell him before I left that the fight on sequencing was already over before the bell had sounded for Round One. But it was over well before they realised it, and Dublin had also totally outplayed them on what became, by later in 2017, the backstop question.

Worth adding, incidentally, that not only did we understand well before the referendum, the centrality and immense difficulty of the border question, particularly if we ended up with as thin / hard a Brexit deal as I expected; we also knew that it was absolutely imperative for the Irish to get the question inserted into phase one of the withdrawal agreement process, and that the other 26 would always back the Member State against the non Member State – the third country – on such an issue. When I say 'we', I mean top officials, not the Ministers or Spads who arrived after the referendum. They nearly always thought they could unpick the solidarity of the 27, and they proved wrong over and over again

Davis is a man of incredibly fixed prejudices. He's a perfectly affable guy to work with, very amiable, just incredibly prejudiced on how things were going to

have to work, and a bit naïve on how it actually works between Brussels apparatchiks and the key capitals, and with me obviously being the main – perhaps only – voice saying, ‘I just don’t think it will quite work like that.’ I think he was really badly treated by May, and I have already said why I think the relationship between him and Robbins was destined to fail from the start, as it duly did.

I think, yes, she was actually completely finished by the time I had resigned. It was just a long lingering painful demise. I said to the office when I quit, ‘She won’t last another two years.’ I was wrong there because I didn’t know about the election – and she ended up lasting a bit more than two years. Though her proposed deal had no serious chance of passing in the House. I thought there’s no recovering from this. The only time she could have recovered but that would have needed a complete reset was after the election.

Her only opportunity after the election, which was obviously a totally miserable experience for her, and saw the end of her Praetorian Guard was to think, ‘I cannot possibly get my version of Brexit through solely on Conservative votes.’ Then she’d have had to go bipartisan. Now, had she really tried to go bipartisan, I think her party would have killed her anyway – and faster than they actually did – so I still think she was dead under all scenarios. But she had to work out that then she had to make the approaches to the Hilary Benns and Yvette Coopers and Keir Starmer and others, and say, ‘I’m going to deliver a version of Brexit which is going to be really quite unpopular with my Right, I need you to help.’ I just don’t think it would have succeeded either with Labour or with her own party, and her party would simply have shot her earlier. But what am I saying in 2018 to folk I know in Brussels and capitals? They all recall it now because I was saying it to them before anybody, ‘She simply will not get her version of Brexit through the House. She has not got the votes in her own party. They will kill her rather than allow this version of Brexit.’

Then she cycled through first of all the disaster of December 2017 and the Irish Agreement. At that stage, again I’m saying to people who are seeking my views, ‘This thing can never fly. She just can’t deliver this version of a backstop. She’s going to need and argue for an all-UK backstop. But that delivers a version of Brexit which the majority of her own side hates. So this is trouble.

UKICE: But do you think she had a version of Brexit in mind, in the time you were there up to Lancaster House?

IR: No. I really don't think she knew what she was doing, and that's the tragedy of it, and I don't think Olly knew enough about it at that stage to give her a viable version of Brexit. I think Olly is a very smart guy.

But key EU players think the tragedy of Olly is that he worked out where he might have to get too late. And by the time he had got there, he'd become absolutely public enemy number one within the Tory party and the Right of the party who thought that he was the disastrous éminence grise for Theresa May; and they were determined to get him, and he became the problem.

Reflections

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Why did the UK Government seem so surprised by the Irish border issue and the way the Irish played it?

Ivan Rogers (IR): I don't know. And again, to be honest, there they missed me. I'd developed a great working relationship with Declan Kelleher. He's a really smart guy with huge experience. Rory Montgomery is very smart and John Callinan, who became Olly's opposite number, is very smart. So they had a really very good team, they knew what they were doing. They had a really good diplomatic operation on it. They were much superior to Whitehall, which should give London pause for thought.

I just don't know. Olly became the point man on Ireland. At one stage I think the Irish cabinet secretary asked Jeremy who the point man on the Irish question was, now that we didn't have Jonathan Stephens or Jonathan Phillips and whatever, and got the answer Olly Robbins. And I think they raised their eyebrows and thought 'But Olly doesn't know anything about the Irish question and doesn't have the Good Friday Agreement background.'

UKICE: Jonathan Stephens was still there as Permanent Secretary in the NIO then?

IR: Yes, but Jonathan sort of fell evidently out of favour clearly within Whitehall, and very unfairly, I think. But then I think the Irish thought, 'Well, we don't

actually have anybody any more in Number 10 who really understands the Good Friday Agreement and the Irish perspective.'

I don't know. Olly had to do. I felt very sorry for him on that because it was just ridiculous, the loading of the job. He had about the most difficult official job on Earth as it was, and then to give him Ireland as well as the most difficult job. Then did he understand...?

As I say, this is a very able man, but you are having to go up an incredible learning curve on all manner of things at the same time as well as running a department as well as being a sherpa. This is lunacy.

No other country would have left the European Union and put someone with almost no relevant prior experience in charge. And then triple hatted him. This is what a system failure looks like. Imagine running something like a financial crisis and saying 'Let's put someone on top of it who is not contaminated by expertise in the financial sector.' Absurd.

UKICE: I wondered if you might just reflect on the longer term. Two questions. One, what the whole process of the last four and a half years of getting Brexit done, what are your reflections about the civil service's role in this, what's it shown us about the civil service. And what impact has having to deliver Brexit for Theresa May, Boris Johnson, had on the civil service, and ministerial-civil service relations.

IR: Well, I think it's pretty corrosive, isn't it? This is a massive set of conversations, lots of different questions in there.

On the negotiation ... Look, I do think Whitehall, I mean I always thought this and said it to Andrew Turnbull, Gus O'Donnell and Jeremy when they were there, that we've got worse on the European question, that we ghettoised it, that there were very few people like Jon and me. Obviously it was good that Tom came in and acquired the knowledge he did, and he's a brilliant guy, but there were very few people who understood it at any senior level or had the relevant background or pedigree. And they were very ghettoised, so most domestic mandarins and domestic boards of departments really didn't understand much about European business. And then they're suddenly confronted with a truly massive existential challenge.

One meeting sticks in my mind; it sticks in Nick Macpherson's mind because he came out, just before he retired, with Jeremy and with a load of Permanent Secretaries whom Jeremy and I had invited out to stay with me, I think it was January 2016. I acquainted them with Martin Selmayr and Klaus Welle – the Secretary General of the European Parliament, and frequently styled Prince of Darkness – and people like that just to show that there was a completely different world out there that they had no knowledge of; and clearly, many of them thought it was quite remarkable. Another planet.

But you had really able people like Philip Rutnam, for whom I've got a lot of time on domestic business, saying in front of Jeremy five months before a referendum that first, that it was quite clear that the referendum was going to be won, so he was not going to waste too much of his time on it, and second, there weren't many very important issues for transport in the Brexit question. I mean: where do you start? And Philip's one of the ablest, let's be clear.

UKICE: How did he conclude that?

IR: You're sitting there, you know, my jaw was hitting the table at this point. I'm thinking, you know, aviation and ports and ferries and rail and haulage. And that's just one Department without huge EU expertise in it.

But that shows you, I mean, I do think that for Whitehall skills on international negotiations and knowledge of European Union and what it is and what it had become, had atrophied a lot at the senior level, but also was ghettoised in departments – they're all in ghettos of expertise like Peter Storr in departments who know what they're doing. But they're often almost completely insulated from anybody else in the department.

So the moment it becomes an existential question – because Brexit is a revolution; it's the biggest regime change in British governance for at least 50 years but probably longer. It involves everybody, and then suddenly a whole load of people who've never thought seriously about any of these questions before are confronted with massive radical institutional changes, which involve changing the construction of our own state to resume control over things that we hadn't fully thought about for 45 or 50 years.

And you're having to run the most complex negotiation in history where, let's

face it, you're the junior partner and the other side can beat you up quite badly, and has more of the levers, at the same time as re-engineering your state. And they know your negotiating positions on most of the key stuff, because, oddly enough, they have been representing the U.K. in multiple big negotiations. That's what I am warning people about in my notorious departure e-mail. The other side is clever, astute, knowledgeable and it knows all your positions. And at the same time you are having to demonstrate to a bunch of revolutionaries who think that you're basically all paid-up Remoaners who are just completely bought in to the existing system, that your heart is in it.

So it's a massive set of problems, hugely corrosive. I'm worried about it. I occasionally say to Tory politicians who talk to me: if you seriously want a top class system which is not wholly politicised – which is our system, and you may care about its integrity when you next lose – you need top quality people who truly know their onions about stuff, including stuff you don't much admire. Not people who are there because of their demonstrativeness about believing.

And I didn't have to believe in Tony Blair's public service reforms or Gordon Brown's tax policy, but it doesn't stop me working on it. You know? You either want a system where there are mandarins like me who are paid to have deep knowledge, deep expertise, find ways to transmit it, find ways to then percolate that around the system and help you guys think through exactly where you are.

Or you think if these guys are not with the programme and not fundamentally with us and not true believers in the project, we can't work with them at all. But if you're on the latter track, you are really going to struggle in lots of international fora and international negotiations, because I'm afraid you just need people who've been around circuits a long time and have thought about these things for a long time and know how all the other people are going to approach them.

It's just a huge set of questions. I don't know whether the civil service will come through this in good shape. It's good news if we get people like Dan Rosenfield back in Number 10.

UKICE: So will things change? Does that soften over the next five years as sensible people, who are nevertheless with the revolutionary programme on Brexit, think 'Yeah,' but for the next stage of the revolution and what are we

going to do and what does extensive domestic reform actually look like, we do need some permanent people we trust and rate.

It's the Margaret Thatcher thing, that actually although Thatcher could be difficult and demanding – rightly so – she actually had a very strong relationship with plenty of mandarins across the system, and trusted secretaries of state and mandarins to get on with it. And of course certain people got executed because they were definitely not with the Thatcherite programme.

But she didn't have a complete and fundamental lack of trust in much of the top of the system, and she worked through the system and completely mobilised the best people in the system to deliver results.

Can you get back to that? I'm really not sure you can now. And when I talk to people who know Michael Gove and Theodore Agnew and Francis Maude. I'm just not convinced that's their view of what civil servants and mandarins are there for any more. But revolutions, even Maoist ones, are not permanent. We have not reached Thermidor yet, let alone Napoleon. History does not end in 2020, anymore than it did in 1973 or 1992. I have rather a feeling that quite a lot of what we have right now will look quite curious in a decade or two.