

Speech by Ian Milne

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META: The Ministry of EU Transitional Arrangements

Mr Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen:

Let's mentally transport ourselves into the near future. The British Government has decided which alternative to EU membership it wants to adopt after leaving the EU. The referendum has taken place – it's behind us. The verdict was OUT.

The government has triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. The next phase – unwinding ourselves from thousands of EU Directives & Regulations firmly embedded in British law over the last 40 years – is about to begin. That phase involves putting into place a new & durable British constitutional framework. The purpose of that is to deliver security & prosperity for the people of the newly-independent sovereign state that the UK's about to become.

How, from a practical, mechanical, feet-on-the-ground, nuts-and-bolts point of view, to deliver that outcome? What's the process? What, managerially & administratively, is to be done? What's the time-scale?

The Lisbon Treaty's exit clause, Article 50, sets a maximum 2-year period between notification that a country's leaving & the final exit date – with or without a withdrawal agreement in place. However, my view is that the UK should inform the EU that it will leave the EU - whatever happens, with or without the withdrawal agreement specified in Article 50 - exactly **one year** after the referendum's OUT vote.

During that year, the British net contribution to the EU Budget – by then at least £ 14 bn – will continue to be due, but cease on the day that the UK is out. (As an incentive, we might stipulate that the whole amount be paid at the end of the one-year notice period.)

Here's the plan (*first sketched out in "Time to Say No"*). We create a brand-new British ministry called the Ministry of EU Transitional Arrangements – META. META will extract the UK from the EU. Once that's done, META will be wound up. In other words, META is a temporary ministry.

We shouldn't assume that the EU will drag its feet and endlessly spin out the withdrawal negotiations. The trade imbalance between EU-27 and the UK is such that the motivation of Germany especially would be to get an agreement as fast as possible. In addition, the USA, China, Japan & other non-EU countries – all with major stakes in trading & security stability & legal certainty with European countries - will apply pressure to ensure that UK and EU negotiators get on with the job.

British exit will be a major geo-political event, comparable to the fall of the Berlin Wall. "Brexit", at a minimum, will probably provoke other departures, and/or a major re-shaping of the EU. It will be in British interests, as well as the interests of Germany, France, Italy & the other 23 member-states, that all parties, especially the Commission in Brussels, behave like grown-ups. They will have to negotiate seriously & rapidly to get a withdrawal agreement into place in a matter of months, not years.

In terms of intricacy & complexity, a UK-EU exit agreement will be comparable to a major engineering & construction project. **Crossrail**, now going on almost under our feet, the biggest civil engineering project in Europe, is one example. The **London Olympics** is another. So is the **high-speed rail link** between Folkestone & the Channel Tunnel. So is the **Tunnel** itself – a genuinely impressive Franco-British engineering achievement that, incidentally, had nothing to do with the EU. Looking back 70 years to 1944, the planning & execution of the multinational **D-Day landings** is another outstanding example. Look too at the astonishing infrastructure – intellectual & material – we've left at Singapore & Hong Kong.

All these multi-disciplinary engineering & military projects involve scientists, engineers, mathematicians, the construction companies themselves, architectural practices, consultant engineers, law firms, accountancy firms &, last but not least, advertising agencies & public relations firms.

An EU/UK exit agreement can also be compared with a takeover agreement of one multinational corporation by another. In the City of London alone, there are dozens of major investment banks, law firms & accounting firms who are negotiating, structuring & funding such takeovers every day of the week. That expertise will undoubtedly be called upon when the Brexit process begins.

Ladies & Gentlemen: This country can do huge & complex projects.

I put it to you that all the drive & talent & creativity & management skills for conducting a successful & rapid British exit are here on our doorstep.

That's the good news. The less good news is that the record of government in designing, creating & running major projects & organisations is, at best, patchy. (Current examples are HS2 & the putative new London airport.)

It follows that during the exit process the UK should maximise private-sector involvement, & minimise government involvement. In practice, what does that mean?

Let's start with leadership.

META's full-time Chief Executive will be hired from the private sector: perhaps from the Armed Forces: someone with top-level experience of successfully managing complex projects of the type mentioned above. He or she reports to the non-executive part-time Chairman, a senior Cabinet minister, who in turn reports to the Prime Minister. The deputy chairman is a senior Opposition Shadow Cabinet minister, since management of the exit process is a cross-party affair.

How will our new ministry, META, be structured? To answer that question we need to ask ourselves: with what & with whom will we be negotiating in Brussels? As we know, the Brussels bureaucracy is bloated & multi-layered. But the Commission, & its 33 Directorates, most headed by a Commissioner, are where – for better or worse – the detailed business gets done. Six of those Directorates are admin directorates – translation, interpretation, IT etc, so we can put them to one side. That leaves 27 Brussels Directorates with which META will be negotiating British exit.

So, META will be organised into 27 Departments, mirroring the corresponding Directorates of the European Commission. The Head of each META Department will conduct the transition process, for those matters for which he or she is responsible, with the Commissioner in charge of the corresponding Commission Directorate. The Head of each META Department will liaise as appropriate with British private-sector and public-sector bodies affected by the transition. (These Heads of Department will also be responsible for liaising & negotiating with countries & bodies – the World Trade Organisation for example – beyond the EU, but let me focus here on the EU.)

Existing ministries (HM Treasury, the FCO, Business, Ag & Fish, Defence etc etc) will report to META on all **transition** matters. META will be principally staffed by senior executives from the British private sector, from business, transport, energy, City, farming, fishing, military and legal circles. The latest project-management techniques will be bought-in from the private sector to ensure that the transition process runs smoothly and completes on time. META will complete the bulk of its work one year after the referendum. But META will remain in existence for a further three years, to help resolve any “left-over” issues; then it will be wound up.

Not all of the META heads of department will be British. Some – especially the trade-related ones – will be Australian or Canadian, or Singaporean or Norwegian, with current experience of sitting & voting at the WTO in their own right, & negotiating Free Trade Agreements worldwide on behalf of their countries.

As a rule, whether for the senior posts in META or the less-senior ones, British civil servants will not be recruited.

I don't want to be unfair about British civil servants. Quite a few of them – even in the Foreign Office – are serious eurosceptics. Some of them are highly competent. But most of them will have spent their careers under a succession of Europhile British governments, religiously – nay, enthusiastically – transposing EU regulation into British law. That's not meant as a criticism of civil servants. It's just that their experience is the very opposite of what META needs.

Neither would META employ people from the international transnational quangocracy – bodies like the EU itself, the World Bank, the IMF, the United Nations, the OECD & so on. The EU is a particularly flagrant example of an overpaid arrogant transnational quangocracy; others are the rather dubious International Criminal Court & the equally dubious International Panel on Climate Change.

META will also play a vital role beyond the field of bi-lateral UK-EU relations. UK exit will have huge implications globally. META will facilitate negotiations by giving our allies and friends in the Commonwealth, the USA, Japan, the EEA, EFTA, EU-27 & beyond a "single telephone number" for all matters concerned with British exit from the EU.

Let me turn now to a key component of this particular project: **intensive face-to-face negotiations**. It's clear to me that for the duration of negotiations, META must have a physical presence in Brussels itself. It's equally clear to me that that physical presence could not and should not be in the various existing UK delegations & embassy-type bodies in Brussels.

META will thus take separate, independent, spacious, prestigious & no doubt expensive office premises in Brussels, close to the Eurostar terminal at the Gare du Midi. Those premises will include conference-rooms, offices, decent accommodation, cafeterias, computers, and so on. Back in London, META & its staff will be headquartered in modern state-of-the-art premises within a five-minute walk of the St Pancras Eurostar terminal. St Pancras to the Gare du Midi is around 2 hours; St Pancras to Westminster is around 20 minutes.

META is not the only way to deliver the exit process. I very much hope others can come up with better ones. But what I'm absolutely certain of is this.

If, as a country, we're serious about getting out of the EU, we have to get serious about the boring stuff like organisation, structure, administration, mechanics & process, as well as the exciting stuff like "policy". We can't just leave it to the office junior in the Cabinet Office.

Mr Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen: Let me finish on an upbeat note. The day approaches when – as somebody once wrote four centuries ago - ***this sceptr'd isle, this earth of majesty, this other Eden, this demi-paradise, this blessed plot,*** will regain its nationhood. Let ***we happy few*** baptise that day **Independence Day**; and may that day be celebrated every year for centuries to come as a special Bank Holiday.