

## Sir Ivan Rogers should be replaced by someone who is positive about Brexit

TELEGRAPH VIEW

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Sir Ivan Rogers was too pessimistic about Brexit CREDIT: THIERRY ROGE/EPA

It is a useful rule of thumb that if Nick Clegg and Peter Mandelson consider a particular event to be a potential disaster for the country then it will actually turn out perfectly well.

These two Jeremiahs were quick to interpret the resignation of Sir Ivan Rogers, the UK's permanent representative to the European Union, in the bleakest terms. Mr Clegg, the former deputy prime minister, called it "a body blow to the Government's Brexit plans". Lord Mandelson said Sir Ivan's departure "is a serious loss".

Without seeking to denigrate Sir Ivan's three-year tenure in service of his country, we beg to differ. Like Mr Clegg and Lord Mandelson, he is steeped in the culture of an institution from which the country seeks to extricate itself. In the 1990s, like Mr Clegg, he worked in the European Commission office of Leon Brittan.

Of course he knows his way around Brussels better than most. But while that might have been useful when we were intending to stay in, it is less so now we have decided to leave. As the ultimate insider, Sir Ivan had decades of exposure to the Brussels groupthink which holds that the UK is (a) mad and (b) must suffer for having the temerity to exercise its democratic right to leave the EU.

We don't know why Sir Ivan has gone now rather than after the vote in June and it is to his credit that he remained in post unlike Lord Hill, the UK commissioner, who quit

immediately. Perhaps he wanted to lay the groundwork for the negotiations to come, though it was disclosed before Christmas that he was despondent about our prospects. In a leaked private memo to ministers, he said it could take 10 years to obtain a trade agreement and it may not happen even then. Sir Ivan reported that this was the “European consensus”.



Lord Hill, the UK's European Commissioner, rushed to resign immediately after the referendum CREDIT: ISOPIX/REX

As ambassador, he also advised David Cameron on his ill-starred efforts to persuade the EU to agree reforms that could be sold to the British electorate in the referendum campaign. Some in the former prime minister's circle have blamed Sir Ivan's caution for leaving him exposed to the personal catastrophe that eventually overtook him.

This is unfair: in the end, it was Mr Cameron's call and he called it wrong. Nonetheless, Sir Ivan represents a strand of thought within Whitehall and the Foreign Office that will never be reconciled to Brexit and whose adherents cannot, therefore, be relied upon to push for a deal that would benefit the UK as opposed to the EU.

We need to enter one of the most important 12 months in this country's recent history in a positive frame of mind. That does not mean taking an unrealistically optimistic view of what lies ahead but it does mean avoiding a downbeat approach that will simply produce the outcome we seek to avoid. There seems to be a desire among some diehard Remainers for everything to go wrong for Britain, so they can say their worst predictions were right all along.

Even though the economy continues to confound their forecasts - with the FTSE-100 share index at a record high and British manufacturing reporting the best growth for more than two years fuelled by the cheaper pound - a majority of 122 economists by the Financial Times expects a “significant” or “marked” slowdown in UK economic growth this year. They have been wrong before and almost certainly are again. There is far too much gloom around Brexit. Theresa May can help lift it by sending a replacement to Brussels who will speak up for Britain and its excellent prospects outside the EU

