

Brexit: Immigration concessions for trade benefits?

1. Those who advocate immigration concessions for trade advantages have not thought it through. In practice, it is hard to see what the former could be.
2. Net migration from the EU at 180,000 is about half total net migration to the UK.
3. The obvious and best approach after our departure is to apply our current immigration system to EU migrants, amended as necessary.
4. It would make sense to exempt tourists, students, genuine marriage partners and the self-sufficient from both visas and numerical limits. However this could hardly be described as a concession as it is clearly of benefit to both sides. The numbers are very small, they are beneficial to the UK economy and add little to net migration over the longer term.
5. The key issue will be migration for work which accounted for just over 70% of approximately 250,000 EU arrivals in 2015.
6. Our suggestion is that they be incorporated into the existing UK work permit scheme with a suitable cap. This would eliminate the lower-skilled workers who comprise 80% of those who have arrived here in the last ten years.
7. The Migration Advisory Committee, in August 2016, found that migration into lower-skilled work “had a neutral effect on UK-born employment rates, fiscal contribution, GDP per head and productivity.”
8. This change would lead to a reduction in net EU migration of about 100,000 a year but, again, could hardly be presented as a concession.
9. The EU might well press for a quota for lower-skilled migration. This would be especially important to the East European member states as the numbers are substantial. The UK issues about 600,000 NINOs to EU citizens every year although not all are for work and some workers are only here temporarily.
10. It follows that any such concession would, to be of interest to the EU, have to be so large as to vitiate attempts to reduce EU migration as mandated by the referendum.