



Hard or soft? Dirty or smooth? What Brexit do you prefer?

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In the absence of any detail about what the British government might ask for in its negotiations with the EU as it leaves, there has been much debate about the different options. Unfortunately, since few people seem to understand the issues involved, much of that debate has been about the emotional conceptualisation instead.

Most prominent to date has been talk of 'hard Brexit', which appears to involve either the failure to reach an agreement within the two year time limit of Article 50 or the UK unilaterally declaring it wants no agreement. In either case, the mood here is about the UK making a full and clean break, and is a favourite of those who worry that the British government is going to try to keep as full a relationship with the EU as possible. Of course, disentangling more than 40 years of membership cannot be done overnight, so this is as much a hope as it is an actual possibility.

'Hard' leads to 'soft', which has been presented as meaning long transitional periods or keeping lots of links, either to reduce the economic impact (if you like the idea) or to maintain the EU's control over the UK (if you don't). The language here is all quite masculine, which is why the debate has moved on to...

'Dirty Brexit' (which is possibly also a cocktail) has emerged recently as a new way of looking at things. Here the focus is on the chaos of leaving without an agreement, with its antonym – 'smooth' – suggesting that the manner of leaving matters as much as the final destination.

However, what all these words tell us is that we don't really know what is either possible or desirable. Until we know more about these things, the only thing we can be sure about is a 'bumpy Brexit'.