Twitter Thread by Alan Beattie



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The chart-topping band of @ChrisGiles_ @jimbrunsden (me on drums) have a piece up about the Brexit level playing field stand-off. But here's the thing: the opacity surrounding these (as so many) trade talks is making things much worse. Quick ■

One of the things that struck me talking to experts about this was a lot of hedging about "this is what I think the EU means" and "this is what the UK appears to believe". There's lots of jargon (non-regression, ratchet, equivalence etc) capable of multiple meanings. (2/n)

And even if the negotiators have been clear with each other about what they mean, they certainly aren't being transparent with their domestic constituencies: the EU member states and Westminster MPs aren't being given full details about exactly what's being proposed. (3/n)

There's an unhelpful culture of secrecy around almost all trade talks. Few texts are released along the way. The standard reason is so not to give away negotiating positions to the other side. This is, to use a technical WTO term, obvious bollocks. (4/n) https://t.co/95Qp5ugHIo

If you're not telling the other side what you're proposing, you aren't negotiating, are you? Duh. The function of secrecy is actually to hide from the public what's going on. But how are you supposed to build domestic consensus around a proposal no-one can see? (5/n)

On Monday I wrote about the possibility of rational failure in the talks. It's quite possible eg Boris Johnson is failing to tell the British public about what UK & EU are really proposing because he wants no-deal. OK, that's his choice. He's PM. https://t.co/A4gMXUoOxt (6/n)

But it's also possible that a feasible landing zone is missed because both sides are genuinely unaware what their domestic constituencies (France, the ERG) will accept. (7/n)

And unless you drag these proposals into daylight and let us all work out exactly what we are talking about, the chance for mishap will increase. Might it mean the talks immediately die, as there clearly is no chance of the red lines intersecting? Maybe. (8/n)

But at this rate, unless this whole stand-off is carefully choreographed (a real possibility btw) they're heading for failure anyway. Might as well give transparency a go. When all else fails, try telling the truth. You never know, it might work. (9/9)