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## Brexit is not a problem to be overcome – it is an opportunity to be seized

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**B**ritish factory production is at a 22-year high, there is record employment, and the UK has the highest level of foreign direct investment in Europe. We all supported Brexit, but if Vote Leave had told us before the referendum this would be the news from the British economy after a Leave vote, even we would have been sceptical. Yet, a year on, that's exactly what's happened.

So why then is Brexit still being treated as a problem we can't wait to be rid of rather than an opportunity to be seized?

This isn't about saying I-told-you-so to Remain supporters – they are as concerned about our country's future as us and deserve respect. Nor is it about putting heads in the sand and pretending Brexit poses no challenges.

But supporting Brexit is too often portrayed as a vote to turn the clock back. Nothing could be further from the truth. For us, the Referendum was about two competing visions of Britain's future – and we are excited about our prospects as a dynamic, global, independent nation.

It is vital we start emphasising this optimistic vision. Because if we sleepwalk into seeing the next two years as an exercise in damage limitation, we will wake up to find a once in a generation opportunity has slipped through our fingers.

And, like it or not, that failure will be blamed on us Conservatives. If we lose confidence in Brexit as a party, we shouldn't be surprised if the British people lose confidence in us.

In five key areas, the Government must use this Parliament to make sure that doesn't happen.

First is trade. Free of the customs union, we can use our new powers to link our exporters to dynamic growth around the world. Simultaneously, the Government should scrap the tariffs protecting EU special interests, a move that would instantly lower prices for British shoppers.

Second, immigration. Not one of us believes in pulling up the drawbridge to international talent. But, by refusing to give the public a say on how low-skill immigration is managed, the EU has caused faith in the system to collapse. By

introducing a humane, controlled immigration regime that recognises talent and shows compassion, we have an opportunity to regain the public trust necessary to reinvigorate British internationalism and once again become a beacon for the world's brightest.

Next comes regulation. Just like companies, governments innovate best when they compete. It's not surprising, therefore, that European collectivism has left our regulations flabby. Brexit is an opportunity to spur our regulators to innovate, forcing them to make rules that revitalise our economy, not bog it down in red tape.

The fourth opportunity is economic innovation. Brexit can be our industrial strategy's rocket fuel. Thanks to restrictive state aid rules, EU membership makes support for infrastructure like broadband subject to onerous approval processes or bureaucratic work arounds.

Brexit is a chance to sweep these aside. Better still, we can start using innovative tools currently constrained by the EU like beefed-up, low-tax Enterprise Zones and Free Ports to attract jobs and investment to the country's most deprived areas.

Last, but most importantly, Brexit is a chance to revitalise our democracy. By muddying the waters of accountability, EU membership has made it too easy for politicians in Westminster to pass the buck to Brussels. Or they struggle against an interventionist European Court that doesn't reflect British values.

With a clean break from the EU, British voters will once again know exactly who is responsible for everything from supporting the steel industry and keeping our rivers clean to setting the VAT on tampons and raising animal welfare standards, making it easier to kick out lawmakers who don't have their own bold convictions.

Opportunities like these are what Brexit means to us and why we voted to set Britain on this bold future course.

We British have always been suspicious of radical ideas. But if ever our country needed to soften its upper lip, to energise its politics with passion, imagination, and optimism it is now. We've spent long enough on the back foot. It's time to shout about that idealistic and hopeful vision for post-Brexit Britain and find the self-confidence to deliver it for the British people.