

have no say in EU technical requirements, including product standards. In addition, the country would have only partial access to the EU services sector which could be a major drawback as services contribute about 80% to the UK economy. Finally, if the UK were to adopt the Singapore and Hong Kong model, which is essentially a unilateral free trade approach, it would not impose any tariffs, relying instead on the WTO's minimum requirements regarding permissible trade treatment across the WTO membership base.

Peter went on to say that whatever model the UK and the EU manage to hammer out – either in pure or hybrid form – the complexities of the UK's intended departure from the EU stable are such that the two-year transitional period allocated to finalising the exit arrangements (once Article 50 is invoked and the countdown begins) is looking increasingly unrealistic. He also posed the question: "Is Brexit a certainty?" There is a possibility, he said, that Brexit may not happen. Denmark and Ireland, for example, reran the results of similar referendums "until they got the right results".

Prof Ludo Cuyvers, Emeritus Professor at the University of Antwerp in Belgium, concurred that Brexit was not a foregone conclusion, although sentiment in Europe at present suggests that it is more likely to go ahead than be abandoned. Judging from its trade with the rest of the European Union, the UK is a "junior partner", with less than 50% of its total trade currently with the EU, having declined from about 61% in 2003. However, the UK remains integral to the EU model and securing agreement from the other 27 EU countries on acceptable exit terms will be no simple matter.

One of the clearest messages emanating from the TRADE/WTO Chair-SAIIA workshop was that the current uncertainty surrounding Brexit is just as unsettling as the reality (once the way forward has been mapped out) of the UK leaving the EU. Given South Africa's weak economic climate and with credit agencies circling menacingly, the country can ill afford any more policy uncertainty that will gnaw away at its trade and investment performance, and further weaken its economic prospects.

"Brexit could be a game changer as far as South Africa's ties with the UK and EU are concerned", said **Prof Parsons**, "and South African businesses need to be proactive in monitoring the process as it unfolds and taking the necessary steps to preserve their interests."