2018: Must do better

After a week's break – well, sort of – it's back to Brexit with a vengeance. The big hope for 2018 is that the government will finally get to grips with what is involved in achieving a seamless divorce from the EU. At the moment, we seem to be heading for a most unsatisfactory "transitional arrangement" which will see us still stuck in the EU in all but name for a further 21 months. We would not be able to restrict freedom of movement, we would not regain control of fisheries and we would be stuck with every piece of legislation the EU cares to throw at us without any say in how these laws are framed.

It's hardly surprising that Theresa May's popularity is plummeting and public anger is rising as confidence in the ability of her team to deliver a decent Brexit is falling. A poll conducted by YouGov found that six out of ten think that ministers are negotiating with the EU "badly".

Two Brexit stories did surface during Christmas week – the welcome return of our traditional blue passports in 2019 and the proposal to award a knighthood to Nick Clegg. Enthusiasm for the former has been dismissed as old fashioned jingoism, but this is to miss the point. The production of our own passports without any reference to the European Union will be a powerful symbol that we are once again a sovereign nation, deciding our own laws and no longer being shoehorned into a madcap project which can only end in a catastrophic failure. The colour of the passport is irrelevant.

As for Nick Clegg's knighthood, while he did serve as Deputy Prime Minister, viewed from a broader perspective, it is a reward for failure. After leading his party into coalition with the Conservatives, the Lib Dems were decimated at the following general election. He failed to achieve his great ambition of bringing in a new voting system and then found himself on the wrong side of the Brexit campaign, losing his

seat as a result. For anyone who feels that a reward to such an individual is totally misguided, you may like to sign this petition objecting to it. At time of writing, it has already gained over 45,000 signatures.

In 2018, it's also important for us ordinary Brexit-supporters to up our game. Our enemies are still scheming. We were recently sent this link which comes for a pro-EU website urging people to spend their money supporting pro-EU groups rather than Brexit supporters. Companies and individual on both side of the debate are named. So although we believe it's time to move on from the divisions of 2016, in the face of such malice, perhaps it behoves us to give our support to the likes of Wetherspoons, Tate & Lyle and Dyson rather than EasyJet or anything connected with the Virgin group.

We also need to up our game in explaining the real reasons for the Brexit vote, especially for the young. The appearance of this piece on the *Huffington Post* website a full 18 months after the referendum is very sad and deeply concerning. The author, who identifies himself as a "millenial" still sees the Brexit vote as driven by nostalgia – particularly among older voters. The message still hasn't got across that it was about re-joining the world instead of being stuck in the myopic, misguided and failing European project. Beyond the EU, the project is viewed negatively in a number of other neighbouring countries – including in some accession states. It's not just old-fashioned English fogeys who don't like the idea at all; plenty of ordinary people around the world share their disdain for the project.

The writer enthuses about proportional representation. People like him need to be told that if we really want to update our democracy, the answer is not to change the means by which we choose our elected representatives but the degree to which we can call them to account. Significantly, the best country in Europe, if not the world, to offer us a model for an advanced democracy fit for the 21st century is Switzerland, where "only

a few lunatics” want their country to join the EU.

The young will be the main beneficiaries from Brexit. They won’t have to deal with the problem which has plagued us for over 40 years. They will be the main beneficiaries from the cut in migration – which is already happening – as fewer foreigners entering the UK will reduce the pressure on the housing market. Above all, they will reap the financial benefits, which are for the long term rather than for the immediate post-Brexit period. Rather than voting Brexit for selfish reasons, the older generation sought our departure from the EU for the good of their children and grandchildren as much as for themselves. The challenge for all of us in this new year is to get this message across. We too need to do better.

On that note, we in CIB wish you all a Happy New Year.