

All the King's horses....

All the king's horses and all the king's men

Couldn't put Humpty together again

As 2016 draws to a close, it is ending on a note that few of us could have dared imagine a year ago.

For a start, most informed opinion did not expect any referendum until 2017. David Cameron was widely expected to use the UK's Presidency of the European Council, originally scheduled for the second half of next year, as a chance to showcase the EU and thus maximise the chances of a remain vote. In the event, he presumably decided that waiting nearly 18 months gave the leave side a bit too long to get its act together. Instead, he decided to cut and run, counting on the disorganisation and in-fighting among the leave groups, the lack of an agreed exit strategy, the full machinery of the government and civil service being at his disposal and the well-documented habit of electorates worldwide endorsing the status quo in referendums.

Thankfully, his gamble backfired and we woke on June 24th – at least, those of us who had been able to sleep – to the wonderful news that the UK had voted to leave, with a majority of over one million. For many of us, it was a result for which we had been striving for years if not decades. It had meant four months of total commitment, putting anything resembling a normal life on hold – indeed, some of us are still catching up with the legacy of the manic lives we were forced to lead in order to secure our goal – but it was worth it.

Of course, we're not out yet and Article 50 has yet to be triggered. We do not know the Government's negotiating strategy and much debate in the media has been little more than running round in circles with serious analysis very much

at a premium.

However, we can be confident that the formal process of leaving the EU will begin in the first months of 2017. There are some very vocal and extremely prominent remainiacs who are clearly unhappy about this, but we believe that our analysis that Parliament will not obstruct the will of the people will prove correct. A recent poll confirms that six months on, voters stand by their decision.

Andrew Hawkins, the chairman of ComRes who commissioned the poll, was pretty blunt in his analysis of the result. ***"This poll should serve as a warning to Remain campaigners who want to force a second referendum that the clock cannot be turned back without risking a huge public backlash. Most of the public think the June result should stand and even some 17% of those who believe their personal finances will worsen post-Brexit would still vote to Leave,"*** he said.

Perhaps the big surprise for some of us has been the attitude of the EU. After the initial shock of a result few in Brussels were expecting, the prevailing mindset seems to be that we must make our departure ASAP. No serious attempt to get us to change our mind; the main objective being to cauterise the wound and to prevent the infection spreading to other member states.

This point cannot be overstated. Whatever the machinations of Gina Miller, Richard Branson or Tony Blair, a massive blow has been struck. Like Humpty Dumpty, the EU project took a massive fall on June 23rd and even before the Brexit negotiations begin, the damage to its reputation caused by one country voting to leave is immense and irreversible. The creation of regional superstates like the EU looked like the way forward which everyone sooner or later would have to accept. A few years back, I recall listening to an interview with a number of Swiss voters who all greatly valued their democratic system which they all viewed as vastly superior to EU membership.

“But how long can it last?” I recall one of them saying – the implication being that inevitably, one day or other, Switzerland would have to give it all up and join the EU.

Brexit has dealt that sense of inevitability a body blow. What was seen as a one-way street where the only choice you were given was the speed at which you progressed along it now seems to be open to traffic in both directions. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men – in other words, King Jean-Claude and his acolytes in Berlin, Paris and indeed Washington – cannot sell the European Project with the same authority and confidence as before. Even before the Brexit vote, Aleksander Vucic, the Serbian Prime Minister said that EU membership is no longer the “big dream it was in the past... The EU that all of us are aspiring to, it has lost its magic power.” The same article also quoted Bohuslav Soboktka, the current Czech Prime Minister who faces a challenge from an even more Eurosceptic challenger in elections next year, who claimed that his country may follow the UK through the exit door,

Furthermore, the election of Donald Trump to the White House will do nothing to restore the EU’s tarnished brand. From the 1950s onwards, the US – and the CIA in particular has been one of the main motors driving the European project forward, albeit sometimes covertly as far as its relationship with the UK was concerned. Now America will soon have a president who has compared his own election victory with the Brexit vote and who has consistently spoken very positively about our decision to leave the EU.

All in all, a much better outlook than we could have imagined this time a year ago. The recent claim by the President of the National Union of Students that Brexit would be “a catastrophe for our generation” is just plain silly. We face a bright future and it is the young who will be the long-term beneficiaries. On 23rd June, we finally lanced the boil that has poisoned our country for over 40 years and young people

should be grateful that this long-standing problem has not been bequeathed to them to sort out.

On this note, we wish you a very Happy Christmas and look forward to seeing the beginning of our formal departure from the EU in the New Year.