

# **Brexit is a Major Technocratic Failure by the European Union**

*The EU's misguided approach to the Brexit negotiations demonstrates the failings of its technocratic style of governance. The technocratic approach fails to treat citizens as individuals with political preferences, but rather reduces them to objects whose feelings count for little compared to the teleological goal of a European superstate. Brexit should have been a wake-up call for the EU institutions, but sadly it seems it will go ignored, writes **Nigel Moore**.*

The misguided approach to the Brexit process by the European Commission and the Council represents a major failure of the EU's technocratic style of governance. A failure to understand or respond positively to the political dimensions of their actions; a failure to follow their own laws, treaty obligations and rules to mitigate the damage caused; a failure to learn from their mistakes. Rather than adapt they appear set to double down on their agenda to create a homogenous European superstate through inflexible, centralised, top-down control. Ultimately, their ever-hardening attitude will lead to a destructive political schism in Europe, something they will find increasingly difficult to understand or control without coercion.

## **The Brussels Bubble ignores the political dimension**

At the heart of the EU's whole approach to people (be it in policies, laws, regulations or behaviour) is to treat us as objects or resources, rather than 'flesh and blood' sentient

and intelligent individuals. Thus, the feelings of the citizens in Member States, including anguish and stress, can be ignored in the interests of serving ideological or bureaucratic purposes. The EU may appear compassionate in theory, but is often far from it in practice. In particular, the EU refuses to respond compassionately to events that interfere with its chosen direction, namely its obsession with the 'European Project'.

The European Commission has built up considerable expertise in centralised top-down regulation, as a means of creating a homogenous European Superstate. Whilst often starting relatively unobtrusively, this approach inevitably leads to over-regulation as Eurocrats search for activities to bring under their ever more demanding control. Yet this does not occur in a vacuum, there is the wider or bigger picture where it all fits in. Each initiative has political, economic, public safety and security implications. The political dimension itself can be very wide-ranging including notions of cultural heritage, identity, democracy, freedom, law and social stability.

Bureaucrats commonly fail to look beyond their narrow specialisations. Their reality is limited to ideological premises, sacrosanct assumptions and concepts to be universally applied. The outside world then remains just that – outside. The European Council of Ministers (political leaders of the Member States), whilst theoretically able to provide political insights, has outsourced much of their oversight responsibilities to the European Commission and German hegemony. Neither Eurocrats nor politicians saw Brexit coming and have been unable or unwilling to accommodate its political dimensions since (see e.g. Theresa May's Impossible Choice 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018 in *The New Yorker*).

The EU's technocrats had the expertise to run rings around Mrs May's negotiating team – yet they failed completely to

understand the political dimensions. The backstop in the Withdrawal Agreement is a case in point. Few political leaders anywhere could accept the creation of a potentially indefinite internal border within their country to serve the interests of a foreign power. But this is not the only issue – handing over to the EU defence, defence procurement and fishing after Brexit are also issues where Brussels has made politically unreasonable demands. Such demands and more would obviously lead to political instability in the UK and a disorderly withdrawal.

## **The Brexit Elephant in the EU's Room**

Whilst a disorderly withdrawal has serious economic costs to both the EU and the UK through loss of frictionless trade, this is far from the only issue. The EU risks political instability and the undermining of its authority within the remaining Member States arising from a perceived democratic deficit – the consequences of its own de-humanised actions and any fall out from economic losses. With a loss of moral authority, the EU can only maintain itself through increased coercion.

The EU's inflexible complacency in the face of a disorderly departure of the UK is misplaced. A mutually beneficial settlement with the UK is essential for everyone, and the EU bears much of the responsibility for any failure to achieve this. Mrs May's appalling handling of Brexit is only part of the problem; in some instances, especially on the indivisibility of the four freedoms, there is evidence of her having been repeatedly misled by the EU's leaders. The EU's behaviour has been and remains more akin to the actions of a hostile power than of a friendly neighbour and ally wishing to maintain a long standing close relationship. Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis has described the EU's Article 50 behaviour as a "declaration of war".

The EU can ill afford to mistreat a major neighbour like the UK, creating acrimony and mistrust on its doorstep. The UK would serve as an example of the missed opportunity for mutually beneficial co-operation: a festering wound that will not heal. The EU needs to find a way forward to enable existing beneficial relationships (including frictionless trade and wide-ranging co-operation) to continue after a real Brexit that satisfies political aspirations in the UK.

In a nutshell, the EU's leaders need to be much less inflexibly dogmatic and much more humanely pragmatic. They need to stop using the Single Market as the thin regulatory edge of the political integration wedge. The European Commission's technocrats know how it can be done; it is within their expertise to know how. It is for the Commission's leadership in conjunction with the European Council to provide the political will to do it. Brexit is a unique wake-up call that sadly is likely to be ignored.