

# Brexit – yes, we mean it!

In a recent article, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard painted an almost surreal picture of the misinformation circulating in the corridors of power in Brussels about Brexit.

He claims that many within the EU never took the Brexit vote seriously. He quotes Wolfgang Münchau, the associate editor of the Financial Times, who claims that the EU has been caught off-guard at every stage of the saga. “We have argued for some time that the main risk to the entire Brexit process is a source of cognitive dissonance on the part of the EU, which has a long history of misjudging UK politics,” he said. He claimed that they did not believe that Mrs May was serious when she said that “Brexit means Brexit.” Unlike the Danish and Irish referendums on Maastricht and Lisbon, there was no call from Brussels for a second vote. Perhaps, one could argue, this was because it was felt that it wouldn’t be necessary as the UK government would back-pedal. Well, they were wrong.

Also quoted in this piece is Garvan Walshe, a former National and International Security Policy Adviser to the Conservative Party. He recently stated that “Britain is no longer the rational, stable country that we are used to. There is a nationalistic, almost revolutionary mood” and went on to claim that the situation for EU nationals living and working in the UK is now so hostile that many will no longer want to work in the country whatever happens. He advised companies to prepare for political breakdown in the UK.

This is hardly a picture of our country that we would recognise. Life has been remarkably normal since June 23rd. The EU has never figured large in most voters’ list of concerns and now the vote is behind us, many people have accepted the result, lost interest and just want the government to get on with it. Having said that, it can be

argued that the campaign leading up to the Brexit vote last June has changed things in certain areas. For instance, people are now far less inhibited when it comes to speaking their minds. There are far fewer taboos compared with the dark years of Tony Blair's premiership. Although this has resulted in a few ugly incidents, overall it is a good thing as it shows that the stifling influence of political correctness enforced by a self-selecting élite has started to wane.

What is more, the Brexit vote was the result of years, if not decades, of campaigning to right what a sizeable number of the population have always regarded as an historic wrong. Winning the referendum may have made us a lot happier, but it hasn't transformed us – suddenly turning us into hostile revolutionaries. The idea that to quote Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, some people now believe that “a once liberal nation is succumbing to dark forces” is ridiculous.

The likes of Mr Walshe may wish to point to the immigration figures for 2016 to try to prove their point. They were published this morning and reveal some welcome news – migration has fallen by 84,000, taking the total to 248,000 – just below a quarter of a million, although still well above the Conservative Party's target annual target of 100,000. The Brexit vote has almost certainly been a factor here as the main reason for the drop has been a notable fall in migration from EU member states, with 25,000 fewer arriving from so-called “EU8” – the former Soviet bloc countries which joined in 2004 – and an increase of 31,000 in the number of “EU8” nationals leaving the UK.

But is this due to “dark forces”? More likely due to a combination of a drop in the value of the pound, a lack of clarity about the status of EU nationals on Brexit and a perception that somehow the Brexit vote was a vote against them – which is a gross simplification of the many reasons why people voted to leave the EU. It is not as if a desire to reduce drastically the current totally unsustainable levels of

migration somehow implies that one hates foreigners, much as some Guardianistas would like to have us believe

On one point, however, we can be sure. Those who voted for Brexit, with very few exceptions, knew what they wanted and still want it. Will there be some difficulties caused by leaving the EU? Almost certainly. It's like an operation to remove a cancerous tumour which will inevitably be followed by a difficult and painful time of recuperation while things heal, but the alternative of not going through with the operation is far worse – certain death. It is this mindset which, seemingly, a good many politicians and bureaucrats the other side of the Channel cannot understand.

To pursue the cancer analogy, we do, however, need the best possible team of surgeons to be performing this pioneering operation and one article drawn to our attention raises a few concerns here. Michael Mosbacher claims that some local Conservative party branches have been blocked from choosing Brexit campaigners as candidates. In Aldershot, for example, which was formerly represented by leave supporter Sir Gerald Howarth, the branch wanted the well-known eurosceptic MEP Dan Hannan as their candidate, but he was not allowed to seek selection here.

With the Campaign for an Independent Britain being a cross-party group, we encounter all shades of opinion and on more than a few occasions recently, your author has heard concerned activists express their opinion that Mrs May is going to “betray” Brexit. Accounts like that of Mr Mosbacher lend credence to such stories, but against that is the momentum within the grassroots of the Tory party and a good number of its backbenchers which will not countenance any betrayal. One notable characteristic of Mrs May which was very apparent long before she became Prime Minister is her solid loyalty to the Conservative Party. She stood to become its leader on a platform that “Brexit means Brexit”, even though we still do not know the detail of what that will mean.

What we do know is that, assuming she wins this election, failure to deliver will not only be political suicide for her but will trigger the worst crisis in her party since 1846 when the Tories split down the middle over the repeal of the protectionist corn laws. So far, she has held her party together and even though arch-remainer Ken Clarke has decided to carry on as an MP well past his sell-by date, she is unlikely to face much opposition from the other remain-supporting Tory MPs – after all, he was the only one to vote against the Brexit bill. Cross the ardent leave supporters on the Tory back benches and that is another matter. Even if Mrs May's team may have kept ardent leavers like Dan Hannan out of the vacant seats, the stakes are simply too high to backtrack. Any fudging on Brexit and yes, we would then see a “revolutionary mood” in the country. Thankfully, we can be sure that Mrs May is well aware of this. She will indeed be that “bloody difficult woman” when she goes to Brussels. Her party – indeed the 17,410,742 voters who supported Brexit – have given her no other option.