

# Donald Tusk (not Trump!) Reminds us why we voted to leave

We will not be providing you with a blow-by-blow commentary on the progress of the European Union (Notification of withdrawal) Bill as we believe that, in spite of opposition from the Lib Dems, the SNP, some Labour MPs and Ken Clarke, it will complete its passage through Parliament in time for Mrs May's deadline of 9th March when the government will formally trigger Article 50. There will be plenty of press coverage and analysis for people wanting to follow the Bill's progress through both houses of Parliament but this website will confine itself to occasional comment on the key moments of the Bill's progress. We will also be monitoring which MPs support and which oppose the will of the people.

Of more immediate interest is a speech by Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, which provided a welcome reminder why we voted to leave. In order to understand where Mr Tusk is coming from, we need to remember that next month marks 60 years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which formally inaugurated what has become the European Union. Naturally, the EU wants to celebrate this milestone but we pesky Brits have already spoiled their party with Brexit and, to add insult to injury, the USA has voted for a president who, in the words of Ted Malloch, the new US ambassador to the EU, "doesn't like an organisation that is supranational, that is unelected where the bureaucrats run amok and that is not frankly a proper democracy."

So what was Mr Tusk's response? The answer is – guess what – More Europe! "We must therefore take assertive and spectacular steps that would change the collective emotions and revive the aspiration to raise European integration to the next level",

he said. Yes, he means further integration. Just to make sure no one could be in any doubt, he also added "If we do not believe in ourselves, in the deeper purpose of integration, why should anyone else? In Rome we should renew this declaration of faith."

He did not go into much detail about how integration was to proceed, There was no mention of fiscal or monetary union within the Eurozone, although he did talk of "strengthening the foreign policy of the EU as a whole." Brexit received only a very oblique mention when he claimed that "the disintegration of the European Union will not lead to the restoration of some mythical, full sovereignty of its member states, but to their real and factual dependence on the great superpowers: the United States, Russia and China. Only together can we be fully independent."

Why could no EU member state be fully sovereign? On which superpower is New Zealand, with a population less than one eighth of Mr Tusk's native Poland "really and factually" dependent? Or Australia, India, St Helena, South Africa or Morocco, to name a few countries at random.

There is a particular irony in this statement given that many EU member states are also members of NATO and have been accused, with good reason, by President Trump of being too dependent on the USA for their protection.

Tusk complained about "Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine" without the slightest mention that the EU must take the blame for the current state of that country by fermenting opposition to a democratically-elected leader.

He also complained that, faced with "national egoism...becoming an attractive alternative to integration", the pro-European élites (his own term, may I add) were suffering from "a decline of faith in political integration."

In other words, it's the same old message, underpinned with

the belief that if it is repeated sufficiently, it will convince the doubters. Tusk's political rival Jarosław Kaczyński, however, is unlikely to be impressed. The leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party has called not for more integration but for the very opposite- a new treaty which would return power to the member states. "The vision of the EU forced upon us by the Lisbon Treaty has failed", he said.

Thinking back to this time last year, we will recall that David Cameron went to Brussels asking for something similar – a return of some power back to the UK. He came away with only a few crumbs which ultimately didn't sway the voters and we wisely voted to leave.

Neither Poland nor fiercely EU-critical Hungary looks likely to follow us out of the door at the moment, but Mr Tusk's words were those of a man who realises that supporters of the European project are on the back foot at the moment. Unfortunately for him, the determination he expressed to carry on ploughing the same old furrow is unlikely to address the growing disillusion with the project across a number of EU member states.

"If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging" goes the old saying and there is much wisdom in it. Unfortunately, Mr Tusk and his friends in Brussels seem both unable and unwilling to turn their digger off.

Photo by Glueckstadt 