

How many “Europhiles” really love the EU? – Some grounds for hope

Call me an optimist if you like, but the collective wisdom I have encountered this last week strongly suggests that, for all the froth in the press and the three million people who have signed the petition calling for a second referendum, Article 50 really will be triggered, possibly later this year, and we will begin the process of leaving the EU.

All our soundings from Parliament are sending the same message:- “The Government has accepted the result.” Yesterday, I was invited by a US-based TV channel to take part in a chat show alongside long-standing europhile Hugo Dixon. It was very clear from his tone that he too had accepted that we will be on the way out of the EU sooner or later.

Reasons for suspicion and unease revolve around the simple phrase “You can’t trust the Tories over Europe”. It has been a mantra among UKIP members and even some Conservative activists have acknowledged the duplicity of their party’s leadership when it comes to the EU.

David Cameron’s discreet manoeuvring to remove the unilateral repatriation of our fishing policy from the Conservative manifesto over a decade ago and his subsequent back-tracking on his “cast-iron” guarantee of a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty are been part of a long tradition of Tory cover-ups going right back to Peter Thorneycroft’s infamous campaign plan to take us into what has become the EU as far back as 1947:- ***“No government dependent on a democratic vote could possibly agree in advance to the sacrifices which any adequate plan for European Union must involve. The people must be led***

slowly and unconsciously into the abandonment of their traditional economic defences, not asked..."

Nearly seventy years on, however, it is very apparent that today's Conservative Party does not contain such ideological europhiles as Thorneycroft or Edward Heath. One of the many post-mortem articles I have read over the last few days (but for which I regrettably cannot find the source) pointed out that in 1975, Heath (for the Tories) and Roy Jenkins (for Labour), both passionate pro-Europeans, featured prominently in the campaign. You could never imagine them beginning a speech by apologising for the EU's shortcomings. Nor would they bend over backwards like David Cameron to insist to their sceptical party that they really were eurosceptics at heart or talk in Corbynesque terms of "Seven to Seven and a half out of ten" for staying in the EU. The absence of such people, the author claimed, was a fatal handicap for the Remain campaign.

It seems that for today's Tory remainers, with the exception of veteran ideologues like Ken Clarke or Michael Heseltine, their reasons for supporting EU membership were more pragmatic than anything else. Leaving the EU would upset the status quo or would be bad for the economy. For those who have known nothing but a career in politics, Brussels offered a convenient and comfortable safety net for any MP losing his or her seat at a General Election.

This is a world apart from the passion which a real 24-carat, five-star Europhile feels for the project. Take Joris Luyendijk, a Dutch author and chat show host. Back in January we find him moaning in the Guardian that even the so-called Europhiles in the UK were not really committed to the project. *"For England, the EU is an economic rather than a cultural and political project,"* he wrote. *"Read pro-Europe newspapers such as the Financial Times or listen to English pro-Europe politicians, and every argument is framed around the country's national interest. In other words, the English attitude towards the EU is transactional rather than*

transformational."

Now we have voted out, he cannot contain his glee. With our country to leave the EU, there is no more danger of pooled sovereignty being rolled back – something about which Luyendijk is unapologetically enthusiastic. *"When Europe's democrats talk about "EU reform" they mean putting arrangements in place to make Europe's pooling of sovereignty democratic. Britons mean the rollback of that very pooling of sovereignty."* It is rather odd that Luyendijk has found himself in the company of Marine le Pen or his compatriot Geert Wilders in hailing Brexit as a good thing – albeit for very different reasons – but he is delighted that "remain" lost:- *"Had remain won the referendum, the EU would have become hostage to British sabotage. Future British prime ministers would veto any fundamental change involving the transfer of sovereignty, arguing, correctly, that their people had voted only for the current set-up of the EU."*

Of course, Luyendijk's bluster may conceal a nagging unease about the fact that, in his country too, disillusion with the EU project is growing, just as it is in France, Italy, Greece and even newer arrivals like Hungary and the Czech Republic. Is he a spokesman for a dwindling minority? Time alone will tell.

As far as the UK is concerned, however, now the vote has taken place, the shallowness of support for the EU within the Conservative Party has been laid bare. Luyendijk is quite correct here. There is very little enthusiasm for any further transfer of sovereignty to Brussels. Furthermore, even if the forthcoming leadership contest may be a bruising affair, the Tories have already (and thankfully) reverted to type – putting party unity and power before anything else.

In other words, the party seems to be coming together around a commitment to make Brexit work, even though they are far from united over the best way out. Vote.leave's reluctance to

provide a coherent exit strategy at the very start of the campaign has been one of the biggest drivers of the current economic and political uncertainty. The leadership candidates all need to study Flexcit or its Adam Smith Institute-sponsored offspring, the Liberal Case for Leave, which, in the absence of any other serious offering, provide the only coherent studies thus far of a seamless route out of the EU which will not disrupt our trade.

Thankfully, we know that the Civil Service have already been examining this escape route in some detail and it is to be hoped that whoever emerges victorious as the next Prime Minister will have based their campaign not on personal charisma but instead, on having sold their fellow-party members a clear road map that can take us through the invocation of Article 50 and on to the actual Brexit. Such a PM will leave this as his or her **only** legacy. So complex is the process of unravelling over 40 years of integration that Brexit will dominate their premiership to the exclusion of everything else

And I remain confident that this is what will happen. This is not to ignore the disturbing vacuum which David Cameron's resignation has created, but with Labour in a state of meltdown and the Lib Dems having been reduced to impotence at last year's general Election, the young europhile whingers – who will ultimately be the biggest beneficiaries of Brexit, even if they don't believe it at the moment – will soon quieten down and the stage will be for the next Conservative Party leader to atone for the party's previous sins by finally obtaining an amicable divorce from the unhappy marriage into which his or her predecessor tricked us all those years ago.

(for anyone wishing to watch the programme on the TV channel I referred to above, the link is here)