

# Reflections one year on from the referendum

The morning of 24th June is a day I will never ever forget. By 4AM, I had given up any idea of sleep and was watching the results of the referendum on my computer as they were posted up on the BBC website. I had always believed that we could persuade our countrymen that we would be better off out of the EU, but David Cameron had gone for a quick cut-and-run campaign to minimise our chances of success. However, as soon as I saw the relative totals for leave and remain, my heart leapt. We're going to pull this off after all! Less than two hours later, the number of leave votes passed the crucial 50% mark. "We've done it! We've done it, We've done it!" I shouted at the top of my voice. It was not yet 6AM and normally I would be much more considerate towards my neighbours, but after sixteen years of campaigning for our country to leave the EU, my overwhelming feelings of joy momentarily got the better of me.

Thankfully, my neighbours have never complained. Perhaps they are sound sleepers. Perhaps the soundproofing of our late Victorian semi is better than I thought. Whatever, I don't think I will be giving a repeat performance!

I spent much of the rest of the day in a daze. We're really going to leave! It was hard to take it in. This was the greatest day in our country's history since the end of the Second World War and I felt a great sense of pride in having played a part, albeit only a very small one, in achieving this memorable result.

One year on from that incredible day, the memories are still fresh in my mind, as I'm sure they are in the minds of many other leave campaigners, but in the meantime, what a roller-coaster we have endured! There was the court case brought by

Gina Miller, the uncertainty about whether Mrs May's European Union (notification of withdrawal) bill would make it unscathed through both houses of Parliament, the sense of relief when Article 50 was finally triggered in March as the Prime Minister had promised, the reluctance of the economy to tank in spite of the predictions of George Osborne's "Project Fear" and most recently, the shambolic General Election which was meant to increase the Government's majority but instead left the Tories turning to the DUP in order to maintain any sort of hold on power.

In spite of the chaos, the Brexit negotiations have started and we are still on course to leave the EU in just over 21 months' time. Media reporting seems to have plumbed new depths since the election results were announced and it has been hard to distinguish the wood from the trees. Terms like "hard" and "soft" Brexit are bandied around often without any explanation, leading some concerned leave supporters to equate "soft Brexit" with not actually leaving the EU at all.

From what I can gather after reading complete articles, including actual quotes, rather than just the headlines, there are very few politicians who actually want to stop Brexit. Many more are concerned about the implications for UK businesses if we don't end up with a decent trading arrangement. Such concerns are actually quite reasonable and do not in any way imply that they want us to stay in the EU. Soundings from Parliament after last June's vote indicated that the overwhelming majority of MPs accepted the result and would not wish to frustrate the will of the people. The General Election has not significantly altered this.

Of course, with David Cameron not having made any preparation for our voting to leave, the government and civil service are on a sharp learning curve and we still await evidence that they have got on top of the brief which the electorate gave them a year ago. Our biggest concern must surely be a chaotic – or more likely sub-standard – Brexit rather than no Brexit

at all.

The main reason why I remain confident that Brexit will happen in some form or other lies in the nature of the Conservative Party. The Tories were given a nasty shock two weeks ago. They went into the campaign expecting to flatten Labour. Instead, they only just limped over the finishing line. Most Tory MPs voted to remain last year, but the vast majority of the party's activists and supporters are strong leavers. The Tories hoovered up quite a few UKIP votes on a platform of leading us out of the EU. Given these issues, any backtrack on Brexit would precipitate the worst crisis the party has faced since 1846 when it split down the middle over the repeal of the Corn Laws. They dare not go there.

What is more, the party will be keen to renew itself well before the next General Election in 2022. While removing Mrs May now would only add to the sense of chaos which has prevailed since the General Election, it is hard to imagine she will still be in power in March 2019, perhaps not even in March 2018. If the party is seeking a dynamic new leader to revive its fortunes, given the ultimate say will lie with its predominantly Thatcherite Eurosceptic activists, Mrs May's successor is likely to be an MP with proven Brexiteer credentials. The party faithful will not make the mistake of choosing another Cameron.

This will not make his (or her) task any easier, but still gives me hope that in March 2019, that historic vote which brought us so much joy a year ago will be translated into reality and we will finally achieve that goal for which so many of us have been striving for so long.