

# Thanks but no thanks!

We have already reported Donald Tusk's comments about his hopes that the UK might have "a change of heart" over Brexit. Now Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission (how many Presidents does the EU have – or need?) has chimed in, saying in a speech to the European Parliament , "once the British have left under Article 50 there is still Article 49 which allows a return to membership and I would like that."

For the benefit of anyone not familiar with the entirety of the Lisbon Treaty (which is probably most of us!), Article 49 says, ***"Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account."***

In other words, we would have to go through a new application process just like any other country wishing to join the EU. This article merely sets out the conditions for applying. There is no mention of a "fast track" process for ex-members who have a change of heart.

Juncker feels a personal sense of responsibility for the Brexit vote. Quizzed by a German MEP, he said, "I still feel the exit of Britain is a catastrophe, yes, a defeat we all have to take responsibility for." He is most unhappy that a member state has voted to leave under his watch. He then went on to say, "But the reasons for the British exit lie deeper. As Prime Minister (Theresa) May has said, the British never felt at ease in the EU and for 40 years they haven't been given the chance to feel more at ease."

It is hard not to be cynical about Juncker's accommodating language only a couple of days after the EU toughened its terms for any transitional arrangement. Combining his words alongside the European Parliament's guidelines for a transitional period for the UK, you get a message which goes something like this:- "We're really sorry that you've voted to leave; we'd love you to come back and as a sweetener, we intend to make it as humiliating and as awkward as possible – within the parameters of the EU treaties, of course – for you to get out." To which could be added "Oh, and by the way, there will be no derogations; you'll have to join the €uro, you'll eventually have to accept the supremacy of Napoleonic inquisitorial law, you'll have to let Spanish fishing boats plunder your waters again and you'll still have to subsidise French farmers. "

"Thanks but no thanks" would be very much at the polite end of suitable replies to this. It is easy to forget just how many good reasons there were for voting to leave the EU. If we had had longer to explain more about the EU's failings to our countrymen and if there had been a comprehensive exit strategy around which the leave campaign could have united, we would have won by a landslide and anyone talking of abandoning Brexit or holding a second referendum would have been referred to a psychiatrist.

Unfortunately, the government's floundering has given the remoaners the space they have craved and they have made the

most of it. On balance, it still looks extremely unlikely that Brexit will be stopped. In response to Juncker's overtures, a spokesman for Mrs May stated that there was no question of a change of heart. We will be leaving on 29th March 2019, he insisted.

But would we ever want to come back? Not if Brexit is managed successfully. It is unfortunate that Boris Johnson has insisted that the savings from withdrawal will, in fact, be higher than the controversial figure of £350 million per week which was bandied about during the referendum campaign. It is hard to follow his logic. In the short term, we are unlikely to be any better off financially, but in the longer term, there is every reason to believe that, free to make our own trading arrangements, to set our own taxes, tariffs and to make our own laws and regulations (or at least to have our own voice on the bodies that determine global regulation), we will be in a better position.

It's not just a question of money, however. Brexit will wrest control of our country away from Brussels. More than that, it provides an opportunity to re-vamp our entire political structure. Our democratic process is in need of a major update to reflect the realities of the internet age. Politicians should face greater scrutiny and be more accountable to us, the voters who elected them and pay their salaries. Perhaps one of the best ways of weaning our young people away from their europhilia is to explain to them the exciting possibilities which direct democracy offers us. Young people are great petition-signers and originators. If we followed Switzerland's example, their petitions could have a real effect on how our country is run.

And of course, Switzerland is not a member of the EU and has no desire to be one. A Swiss minister recently said that in his country, now "only a few lunatics" want to join the EU. If we can make a success of Brexit, Juncker's overtures will fall on equally deaf ears in our country too.

Mind you, considering the headaches we Brits have given the EU in over 40 years of membership, one wonders whether it's only really the lunatics who would seriously want us back – or is it our money they really want?

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