

# Tough Brexit rhetoric by the EU will only highlight its failure

The EU is going to talk tough in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations, so we are told. Last week, François Hollande, the French President, insisted that "There must be a threat, there must be a risk, there must be a price." Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, adopted a similar tone at the same meeting in Paris. "You can't have one foot in and one foot out," he said. "We must be unyielding on this point", he said.

The desire of the UK to restrict freedom of movement for EU citizens while at the same time retaining access to the single market lies at the heart of the EU's tough stance. The UK must not be allowed "to have its cake and eat it", as Boris Johnson once described it. However, some reports suggest that the tough line promised by leading EU figures goes beyond the single market/free movement conundrum. According to the Sunday Times, Didier Seeuws, the Belgian diplomat who has been appointed lead Brexit negotiator for the European Council, apparently wants to stop the UK 'grandfathering' the 36 free trade deals the EU has in place with third countries after Brexit – in other words, continuing to be a party to these deals on independence. The idea that these third countries may want to continue free trade with the UK does not seem to have occurred to Brussels. The same article quoted an EU source as saying, "we cannot make the separation look like a success."

Of course, in view of the lack of detail being provided by Mrs May's government, we are currently only hearing one side of the story, which may well include an element of posturing. It is in no one's interest to go for a suicidal divorce and there

have been hints that a “transitional arrangement” with the EU pending a more complete separation has definitely not been ruled out by the Prime Minister. This could possibly be something along Liechtenstein model lines – although at this stage, we can only guess.

If, however, we are to take the hard words of senior EU figures at face value, they reveal an underlying weakness. Of course the leaders of EU-27 do not want the project to fail and France faces a presidential election next year which M. Hollande is likely to lose heavily. The obstacles to Marine le Pen becoming his successor are considerable, but any deal which makes it look like the UK will prosper outside the EU will only bolster support for her anti-Brussels rhetoric.

But if the EU is such a marvellous idea, should not the UK be pitied rather than punished for leaving it? Just think of some of the institutions that took, or take a severe line towards escapees and defectors – German Prisoner of War camps in World War II, the Inquisition of Roman Catholic church, the Soviet Union, North Korea... Not a very distinguished list. Mrs Merkel, the most powerful leader within the EU, grew up in East Germany, 50 miles from the divided city of Berlin. She will recall the machine-gun posts positioned on the Berlin Wall to stop people trying to leave for the better life in the West.

In reality, there are already countries in Europe that have been proving for many years that life is better outside the EU. Switzerland and Norway took first and third place respectively in the Economist Intelligence Institute’s quality of life index. Switzerland is the only European country to be ranked as “free” in the Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom while in the World Bank’s rating of countries by per capita GDP, Norway and Switzerland are ranked 7th and 8th, ahead of every EU country except tiny Luxembourg.

Norway’s current government is led by a Europhile and the Swiss tend to keep quiet about their excellent lifestyle and

system of government. Neither therefore trumpet from the rooftops the benefits of being outside the EU. Furthermore, these countries never joined the EU. If a member – especially a large country with a higher international profile – left the EU and prospered, the world would sit up and take notice. The very fact that EU leaders are inadvertently admitting that unless they take a hard line, the UK will be better off out shows how concerned they are. Their behaviour, however, poses the question as to why they do not dismember the whole project so the other 27 countries can follow suit and be better off too.

However, the EU élite would rather rave at the “populism” behind the Brexit vote rather than admit that it suffers from a serious democratic deficit that is alienating voters in plenty of other countries besides the UK. We have done the EU a favour in pointing out its shortcomings. In return, it wants to punish us.

Photo by Fabrice Plas

