

Wishing us to fail?

If you have read the Bruges Group's latest Brexit paper *What will it look like?*, you will be aware of the scale of the challenge Mrs May's team will face in negotiating a seamless exit from the EU within the tight timescale imposed by Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. It will be intense – a very hectic time with the potential to go wrong – but the stakes are high on both sides. It's neither in our interest nor that of the EU to reach Independence Day – possibly the end of March 2019 – without some agreement in place enabling trade to flow smoothly.

It is now over eight months since June's memorable vote and since then, the UK economy has defied the gloomy predictions. Anyone signed up to the daily news briefs from Global Britain will be well aware of how well the business sector is doing. Only yesterday, for example, the news brief carried reports of Boeing's decision to establish its first European base in the UK, factories in Plymouth thriving and 500 new jobs being created at the University of St Andrews, including an enterprise centre.

It's a far cry from the doomsday scenario painted by George Osborne. Thankfully, some remain voters who decided leaving the EU carried too great a risk have graciously admitted that they got it wrong. For instance, Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England, said that the worst predictions may turn out to be "just scare stories" and that criticism of economists was a "fair cop" after they failed to predict the financial crisis and were wrong about the impact of the Brexit vote.

True, there has been some negative fallout from the Brexit vote. The fall in the value of sterling, while a bonus for

exporters, has caused a rise in inflation, which is not welcome for consumers. This still needs to be put into context, however. At 3%, Spain has annual Consumer Price inflation running at a much higher level than in the UK – indeed, the UK's current inflation rate, 1.8%, is still below the Bank of England's target of 2%. For most people in the UK, in spite of the inconvenience of rising prices, the Brexit vote has come and gone and it's time just to get on with life.

There are the exceptions, however, the most prominent of which are politicians. Following on from Tony Blair's intervention, Sir John Major's speech at Chatham House rightly infuriated Mrs May's ministers. Major did mention that negotiations were going to be a tough, which is a reasonable enough comment to make. However, the tone of his remarks were very different from the Bruges Group's paper. He called the Brexit vote "an historic mistake" and sought to dampen down the optimism of Government ministers. "The hopes of those who favoured leaving the European Union are sky-high. We are told that countries "are queuing up to do trade deals with us". That "our best days lie ahead". It all sounds very enticing. And – for the sake of our country – I hope the optimists are proved right. But I'm not sure they will be... If events go badly, their expectations will not be met, and whole communities will be worse off."

It is one thing to say that some Brexit supporters, including even members of Mrs May's team, may have underestimated the challenges of the negotiations, but is there almost a wish for Brexit to fail? Are there some people who would positively like to see us slip into a calamitous recession if it means we bottle out and end up stuck in the EU? Take the *Guardian's* Polly Toynbee. Last November, she wrote, "Sooner or later, {Philip} Hammond will have to stop pretending the economy is OK." What was the truth? The economy was doing much better than expected at the time and three months later, the picture

hasn't changed. One comment on the article said "significant inflation is already building up due to this mad plan to leave the EU." As we mentioned above, the UK inflation rate is well below Spain's or Belgium's for that matter, but never mind the facts. It's as if the unspoken message is "oh good – the more it hurts economically, the more chance there is of people reconsidering their decision."

But it's not just columnists and people who haunt the comment sections of on-line newspapers who seem to be willing a recession. In his recent speech Blair admitted that there was "no widespread appetite" for the referendum result to be reversed, but added that he wanted to "build support for finding a way out from the present rush over the cliff's edge." Oh wouldn't it be lovely to have a catastrophe!

Assuming Mrs May manages a successful Brexit, that would be the end of any talk of staying in or rejoining this failing project, which is why, reading between the lines, Blair not only expects but seemingly hopes she will fail. If the secret wish of the hard core remainiacs is that thousands of people should be put out of work, lose their homes and endure poverty because it is the only way so we might be stopped from taking a step forward to freedom and self-determination, all we can say is that these people are merely acting true to form. Perhaps the best comment on Blair's intervention in the Brexit debate came from his former sports minister, Kate Hoey. "Why doesn't he just now go and find himself a job?"

Why not indeed? It's time that Blair recognises that his dream of becoming Europe's Emperor Tony the First died a long time ago. The rest of the EU just wants us gone, Blair and all. There are few in Brussels who want a U-turn now. "This bus has left," said one senior EU diplomat. "No one is happy about it. But we have moved on and the last thing anyone wants now is to reopen the whole issue."

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