

# Brexit: one more year

Richard North, 29/03/2018 [thank you. Ed]

“ In exactly a year's time – barring unforeseen events – we will be celebrating (or some of us will) our first day outside the European Union.

Largely, it will be a token celebration because it will be Brexit in name only. For the next 21 months, we will be non-voting members of the EU, subject to most of the Union's *acquis* and subordinate to the ECJ. And, although our government has been shy about discussing the details, we will also still be paying into the EU budget.

No doubt there will have been alarms on the way, but Labour threats to block the final deal will most likely come to nothing and, as we witnessed **on Monday**, the "ultras" are a busted flush.

A compliant cabinet has a few more surrenders to agree – most notably on the Irish border – and then we will be home free, set to enter the transition period limbo, a zombie-like existence that Mrs May insists on calling the "implementation period".

By making Brexit day a non-event, however, Mrs May has simply deferred so many issues that accusing her of kicking the can down the road is insufficient. Hence we have taken to asserting that it is the whole cannery that has been shifted. Brexit, essentially, will be on hold for 21 months.

On the day, however, the media will no doubt revel in the Brexit "celebrations". One might expect one group or other to set up a cluster of telegenic hilltop beacons, symbolically to spread the word of our departure from the EU. And one can anticipate especially memorable firework shows in the capitals of our constituent nations.

But when the celebrations are over, all we will be left with is the uncertainty. Even as I write, the EU seems not to have received a formal response to its **guidelines\*** on the future relationship with the UK, and when Mrs May is finally pushed into committing something to print, it will doubtless be her hallmark vagueness, preceded by her touchstone phrase: "let me be clear".

The media, so far, has failed to make any sense of the surrender that has got us this far – even if the **Guardian** is finally waking up to the extent to which Mrs May has ceded ground.

If it wasn't so serious, one could almost be entertained by the reminder of David Davis's vainglorious claim that, "there will be no downside to Brexit, only a considerable upside" and the vacuity of John Redwood who declared that: "Getting out of the EU can be quick and easy – the UK holds most of the cards".

Then there was the hubris of Michael Gove who asserted, in similar terms, that: "The day after we vote to leave, we hold all the cards and we can choose the path we want", and the near farcical understatement of Liam Fox who, in July last year, claimed: "The free trade agreement that we will have to do with the European Union should be one of the easiest in human history".

There was also **Peter Lilley**. He almost **choked with rage** at the idea that we should continue to

make payments to the EU budget, rejecting the idea that we would have any liability to pay our share of the *reste à liquider*.

Now, though, as reality begins to take a hold, the confusion and ignorance has made such a mark that there is scarcely a journalist or politician in the land who has demonstrated even an adequate grasp of the issues – leaving the bulk of the population without guidance or understanding. We will most probably start our notional independence in a similar state.

Yet, with all the main issues deferred, the interregnum of the transition period will become one of frenetic activity as the politicians try to solve the unsolvable problem of maintaining access to the markets of the EU Member States without subscribing to the Single Market. As an aside, one expects to see in future history books the picture of Mrs May at Lancaster House on 17 January 2017 (above), marking the point when Brexit started to unravel.

Now, all we can expect is a weak free trade agreement, along the lines of CETA. This may suit Canada, although as a substitute for one of the most comprehensive trade agreements in history, it will not even begin to fill the gap left by our withdrawal.

At last, though, we seem to be getting some recognition of the parlous situation that Mrs May has precipitated, with the news that Home Secretary Amber Rudd is hiring 1,000 border staff, with departmental Brexit preparation costs now hitting hit £450 million.

Around £150 million of that would have to be spent strengthening the border and £170 million on the development of the settled status scheme for EU immigrants. Labour MP Stephen Doughty observed that the money could have funded more than 9,000 police officers. There will be a lot more of that type of complaint, especially when we see how many more port health officials will have to be appointed. \*\*

On the other hand, even though Brexit has effectively been deferred, we are *seeing reports* that British firms are setting up distribution hubs in Europe to ensure that they can maintain sales on the continent after Brexit.

This goes alongside earlier reports that firms were also building stockpiles in the UK, with warehouse space at a premium as measures were put in hand to ensure continuity of supplies once the barriers come down. Then, according to the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, one in seven EU businesses with UK suppliers had moved part or all of their business out of Britain "to reduce their exposure to any complications resulting from Brexit".

Altogether, business consultants Oliver Wyman claim that exporters would face £27 billion in additional bureaucracy, if Britain exits the EU without a deal, and £17 billion even if it gets a basic deal.

And, just to add to the gaiety of life, British fishermen are *confronting their own reality* that so much quota has been sold to foreign enterprises that Brexit will not make a great deal of difference to the English and Welsh fleets. \*\*\*

Nearly 90 per cent of the entire fishing quota of Wales and more than half the quota assigned to England is in the hands of Spanish, Dutch and Icelandic firms. To return them to the UK will cost billions in compensation, making a mockery of any idea of a Brexit bonus for the fishing industry.

As time marches on, more and more anomalies will come to light. No one, for instance, has yet picked up on my report on *Formula One*, and the crisis about to hit horseracing\*\*\*\* still hasn't been given the coverage it deserves.

Now, with 58 EU *notices to stakeholders*, there is more than enough for the media to be going along with. One of *the latest* tells us that, from the withdrawal date, undertakings and organisations that are established in the UK but not in the EU and natural persons who reside

in the UK will no longer be eligible to register .eu domain names, or be able to renew existing domain names.\*\*\*\*\*

Despite this, the bulk of **UK businesses** do not seem to be doing any serious planning for Brexit. Some companies, we are told, have been altogether ignoring vital preparations and contingency plans for Brexit. [Please see Edward Spalton articles on this on the CIB website (campaignforanindependentbritain) where he explains that over 12 months before entry into the EEC the then Government provided detailed guidance for businesses which would be affected.]

To an extent, they can hardly be blamed. With the "completion" of the Single Market, and the introduction of the euro, we were bombarded with official advice on what to do and how to prepare. Going right back to 1971 and decimalisation, I recall the enormous amount of preparation that went into that.

Now, even though we are having to deal with one of the most far-reaching set of changes ever to confront UK businesses (short of a declaration of war), there has been nothing from government. And now there is only one year left to prepare for the changes. To that extent, it is fortunate that there is to be a *status quo* transition period, even though the terms are abysmal.

But the thing we can really look forward to on Brexit day is the end of the huge and growing "stop Brexit" industry. It can stand down and all that energy that is currently wasted on trying to stop the unstoppable can finally be directed at dealing with the consequences of our leaving.

Then, perhaps, we can really get down to the business of Brexit and the media might start focusing on the issues at hand." Dr R North

- \*Guidelines 23 March 2018 from EU are set out in a pdf below.
- \*\* Please see the still awaited Brexit preparations sought in 2017 by our BREXIT EXIT leaflet on this concordanceout.eu site.
- \*\*\* Please see our Fisheries section.
- \*\*\*\* Please see our piece on the Irish Border and Race Horses with thanks to Dr North.
- \*\*\*\*\* like ours at concordanceout.eu