

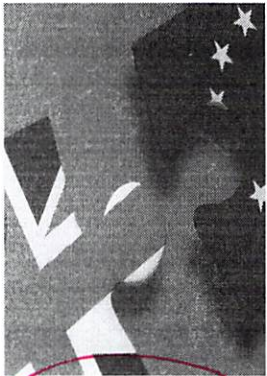


Why

Negotiating Brexit: The EU Will Continue to Stand Firm

With Theresa May greatly weakened, and the UK likely facing new elections and/or a new Prime Minister soon, it makes little sense for the EU to negotiate with her in earnest.

By Stephan Richter, June 11, 2017



Leave it to the delusionists of the Daily Telegraph and their incessant attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Murdoch-owned newspaper, which serves as a hard Brexit propaganda channel, now argues that the UK's hung parliament is the EU's worst nightmare.

Far from it. Still, the newspaper sees indications that "frustrated European leaders – the French prime minister, the German Europe minister – have come out to urge action, warning that the two-year Article 50 clock is ticking."

And, in a surreal reversal of reality, the hope among Brexiteers is that "Europe (!) can put aside its current anger and frustration with Britain and offer the UK a deal that saves face on all sides."

Small chance

The Norway option?

Now, there may be a path for "the UK moving to a Norway-style relationship with the EU with some kind of emergency break that puts upper limits on EU immigration."

But with Theresa May greatly weakened, and the UK likely facing new elections and/or a new Prime Minister soon, the questions is whether it makes sense for the EU to negotiate with her in earnest.

Concessions made to a leader in such a tenuous position are likely pointless, if not – from the EU's vantage point – counter-productive.

Murderous Tories

If Tory leadership is "autocracy, tempered by assassination," according to one definition, then Theresa May is in for a very rough ride. Her autocracy ended with the June 8 election. She is now basically awaiting political assassination by her own party.

And yet, for all the criticism of her, it is also fair to say that she has managed to achieve mission impossible.

To that end, she has, rather desperately, promised all sorts of policy outcomes to all sorts of people.

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HL: Negotiate with May? Takeaways

Theresa May is in for a very rough ride. She is now basically awaiting political assassination by her own party.

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The Tories, as a party, are as venomously divided as are the Republicans in the United States.

Tweet

Concessions made to a leader in such a tenuous position as May, are likely pointless from the EU's vantage point.

Handwritten notes in red ink: "But such a deal while preserving EU market access, ultimately adds up to 'integration without representation.' This would be a soft Brexit – but free from the Tories' pipedreams." and "Link to ECFT piece I sent to..."

Tweet

It is in the EU's interests to negotiate in such a manner to make it practically impossible for the UK to exit.

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Corbyn's traditional dislike of the EU should be greatly tempered by Labour's new political reality.

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Tories as brutal and divided as U.S. Republicans

It would be (relatively) good news if the above-referenced 'bon mot' just indicated brutality at the top of the Tory party machine. The reality is worse.

The Tories, as a party, are as venomously divided as are the Republicans in the United States. Neither is a party in the traditional sense any longer. Rather, each "party" unrelentingly pursues internecine warfare among the various sub-tribes.

The only thing they have in common is that, owing to the rigors of a de facto two-party system in each country, they formally still operate under the same banner.

What does Tory warfare mean for the EU?

The Tories' penchant for brutal internecine warfare means that it is pretty much useless for the EU to make concessions to Mrs. May.

Operating a minority government, she is going to be slaughtered by the hard Brexiteers on the altar of hurt male conservative pride the moment she might make concessions in the direction of a softer Brexit.

Even if there now are fewer of them in the House of Commons, there are enough hard Brexiteers among the MPs so that the frustration of just a few would suffice to bring down Mrs. May.

Back to the future

Without ever saying so, the EU has an overriding interest — playing the negotiating game in such a manner to make it practically impossible for the UK to exit.

Whether that requires another referendum or whether, in a nation weary of yet more elections and referenda, reliance on representative democracy – and hence a parliamentary vote – suffices to withdraw the Art. 50 application, remains to be seen.

As it stands, rest assured that the EU 27, to the extent that the young generation and the productive elements of British society and the economy need support, will drive that point home relentlessly.

This will not just unfold over the course of the negotiations. It will be the negotiating strategy itself.

Labour's changing political calculus

Here is why, from the vantage point of the EU 27, the odds are good: The Labor Party may well come to its senses, notably including Jeremy Corbyn.

Corbyn's traditional dislike of the EU (for its promotion of sensible, market-oriented competition policies) should be greatly tempered by Labour's new political reality.

The party's fortunes were greatly lifted by the youth vote, and Britain's young people definitely want a future where there are no obstacles whatsoever vis-à-vis the continent. Now that Corbyn is truly the leader of his party, and no longer just the (left) winger, his internal calculus must change.

In addition, Corbyn should look with opened eyes at the fact that the EU, in a very practical sense, stands far more for the values of social inclusion which he effectively preached during the campaign than the Conservatives ever will. That means that the EU is actually wind in his sails.

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The Conservatives' changing political calculus

The Tories' pro-business wing is bound to assert itself against the hard Brexiteers now that the May train has run out of steam (and a considerable number of the hard Brexiteer Tory MPs lost their seats).

Moreover, Tories have long assumed that they practically had a lock on England's south. But in a world where the Conservatives even lose Kensington to Labour, then the Tories urgently need to shed their hubris of invincibility. Otherwise, all of London will be Labor territory soon.

A soft Brexit still hurts a great deal

Blinded by ideology, Theresa May and a large part of the Tories still fail to appreciate the fact that – other than British imperial rule in centuries past — the UK's current arrangement of EU membership is the best "deal" her country has ever had with, or will ever attain from, anybody.

To cover up their ^{domestic} cut-to-the bone budget strategy, the Tories that always use "Brussels" or "EU" as code words to cover up for deficiencies made in the UK.

Moreover, being congenitally anti-EU and anti-Brussels was the glue the Tories used to cover up the very deep cracks among the various wings of the party and to suppress their heavily fratricidal tendencies.

To expose this abuse of the European Union and to protect itself, the EU 27's goal must be to conduct the negotiations in such a manner that it always comes back to the point of saying:

If you don't want to face these costs and/or those limitations, simply stay inside the EU.

Bertold Brecht's lesson for the UK

The fundamental lesson which Theresa May, many Tories and the aging part of the country's population must learn is this (with apologies to Bertold Brecht): One cannot eat sovereignty. Sovereignty by itself does not put bread on anyone's table. It just titillates the feeble minds of some pretty gerontocratic reactionaries.

If the Tories are serious about wanting to stay apart from Europe, they must be prepared for a brave new world: Large swaths of the UK's most productive people and job creators (read: the payers of future retirement incomes) will decamp to the continent.

This will leave the Leavers to fend for themselves. With their love for Germany, Tories should also consider that, with its shrinking workforce, Germany has a big welcome sign out for all skilled Britons seeking a new (and less rainy) home.

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About Stephan Richter

Stephan Richter, from Berlin, is the publisher and editor-in-chief of The Globalist. [Berlin/Germany]

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