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Brexit – whatever next?

By George Worsley

The ever-changing journey of Brexit in British politics and the news has caused many people in this country to feel punch-drunk and helplessly resigned to months if not years of upsets and uncertainties.

Fairly soon we will know who will become Prime Minister and the prospects are that the country's leaders will not be seeking to respond to the mood of the people who, in various polls, are keener to Remain in than Leave the European Union. Quite apart from whatever the arguments are and have always been to remain in the EU, Remainers do not see anything consistent in the Brexit way of thinking. Hardly anyone who wants Brexit can agree with other Brexiteers on what they want by way of a deal.

Outgoing prime minister, Mrs. May secured a last and final offer from the EU and the House of Commons turned it down three times. Candidates for her successor are saying that they will get a better deal in spite of Brussels repeating the message: "no change to the offer on the table." It is true to say that some EU prime ministers, such as Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, have suggested they might be willing to re-open the discussions but the EU negotiator, Michel Barnier is renowned for staying put.

The most difficult question is how to resolve border issues on the Emerald Isle. There is no way out although politicians will always tell you, their solution is workable. Even before the Referendum in 2016, insightful observers had foreseen that Remain was the only way to preserve a smooth interaction of people, goods and services between the UK and Eire. Before being booted unceremoniously out of a pub in Dublin, one (now very sore) Guinness shareholder recently suggested that after 100 years maybe "Southern Ireland" should re-join the United Kingdom… Actually, that does deserve one further thought – along the lines of the Scottish dreams of independence: even after a vote to leave the UK, Scotland would forever be bound to England in a way that other "proper foreign" countries like, say, Belgium are not. The Irish economy is very closely linked to England's, as is Scotland's. But to have a United Kingdom made up of an Independent Scotland and an Independent Ireland, let alone what Wales might want, really is another story.

Brexit is around the corner and insurers are digging out their 40-year old Green Card systems and International Driving Permits are coming out of the shoe-boxes in the attic. The Netherlands maintains having already spent millions preparing for Brexit but no-one in this country has any idea what the Dutch have done. Unlike the turn of the Millennium when doomsday-believers firmly expected that the sky would turn psychedelic a nano second after midnight on the 31st December 1999, people and goods crossing the

Channel on the 1st November 2019 will probably not notice any changes. However, in the months and years following the departure from the EU, Britain will have to review and re-negotiate the thousands of agreements on the movement of people and goods not to mention financial services such as insurance. Ports like Calais and the Hook of Holland have been dreading the Olden Days of endless paperwork. The same applies to Dover, etc in this country. The best solution would be for all border guards, passport controllers and customs officials to pop out of the office for a cup of tea or a pint, leave the gates open and let the world pass on by unhindered.

Because the UK was never signatory to the Schengen Agreement, passport control has always existed and the only change will eventually be that EU citizens will join the "All Other" queues along with Americans, Canadians, Australians, etc. Those EU citizens with a right to live in the UK will be allowed to join the UK queue.

Paperwork for wine coming in from France, cheese from Holland as well as supplies of ingredients for sticky toffee puddings destined for English ex-pats on the Continent has always existed but now plans will be devised for import and export taxes. Where it will get really silly is with the aircraft industry for example, where, at various stages of its construction, an engine will get moved to and from a handful of countries where the expertise is located for specialist parts to be installed. Certificates of exemption from cross-border taxes and excise duties will become a forger's bread and butter.

In recent weeks there have been numerous forums where heads of industry sit on uncomfortable stools and talk about how they see Brexit. Some are still saying that the best way to handle Brexit is to carry on business as usual and just ignore the snotty bureaucrat who knocks on the door in an attempt to tell them off. Others feel that it would not be good for too many short-term "fixes" to be proposed; it would be wiser to apply a sort of "put any alterations to existing rules on garden leave" approach for a couple of years during which period new rules can follow the arrangements which yet have to be negotiated.

It is worth noting that although preparing for Brexit with offices in Luxembourg, Paris, Brussels and other cities, many insurers have not yet staffed them properly. Depending on what is negotiated between Britain and the UK on specific matters like a rubber stamp on an insurance policy what insurance company is going to invest in staff in, say, Brussels in November 2019 when the rubber stamps are not required until 2021? Other insurance companies maintain they are ready for Brexit but they might find they are stuck in the starting blocks for a couple of years.

There are stories of people already hoarding up on aspirins and other medication as well as instant coffee because you never know if the supermarkets will run out. Likewise will the grapes from Spain be rotten before they get onto the shelves if the lorry load gets held up in queues on the other side of the Channel? Which way is the pound going to go against

the dollar and the euro? Will the Bank of England up the basic rate? There are too many scenarios making people dizzy with not knowing which way to turn.

There is, however, one question which everybody agrees on – on Brexit Day, the 31st October 2019, who will be running the USA, Ukraine and the United Kingdom? The answer: a comedian!