

Après moi, le déluge'

“Après moi, le déluge.”

King Louis XV of France

So the European Commission could not resist the temptation to intervene in the UK's intensive Brexit debate. Donald Tusk has told us that if the British Parliament do not accept the Withdrawal Agreement, there is just a straight choice between 'no deal' – the hardest Brexit - and not leaving the European Union at all.

As if the UK Parliament needed clear evidence of EU bullying, he has provided it: and his intervention may well backfire.

This week we return to Brexit in the run-up to the 11 December vote. Our firm advice to MPs is sign up to the deal now, and be prepared to break out if necessary in December 2020 - and not before.

This week's quotation has been more recently attributed to General de Gaulle, but is claimed to have been originally coined by King Louis XV (1710-1774). However it fits well with Theresa May as she battles to get the Withdrawal Agreement accepted.

Meanwhile our '[Conditional Brexit Weather Forecast](#)' is based on a useful roadmap unearthed by @bbclaurak from the House of Commons library, and embellished by us with a few severe weather warnings.

The next few days, as we head into the final week before the momentous vote on 11 December, will say a lot about the intelligence of the people we have elected to represent us in Parliament. What drives people to be politicians? For some, it is the wish to make the world - or our country - a better place; for others, it appears to be a mix of grandstanding and opportunism.

There's no doubt that the journey which people take on their way to be members of Parliament has shortened, so that more are career politicians without a depth of experience on which to base their judgement. This may be because the media today is more visual and instant, and bears down hard on older folk coming into Parliament for the first time.

Whatever it is, there will be big questions to answer in terms of intelligence and perspective if they turn down the EU Withdrawal Agreement.

Of course, it won't be the first time government has done something seriously stupid. One of the most stupid decisions in the past 500 years was to deny American colonists the vote ('no taxation without representation'): just think how different the world would have been if Lord North (the then Prime Minister) and George III had agreed to allow representation in the British Parliament, thus avoiding the American War of Independence and uniting North America and Britain.

Returning to the issue facing us today, consider the question about publishing the full legal advice from the Attorney General, which has received much coverage in the Sunday papers. On the face of it, this may sound like a reasonable thing for Parliament to request - and they did unanimously, because the Government had no alternative but to abstain in the face of certain defeat.

The key question that this legal advice has answered is 'does the Backstop in the Withdrawal Agreement hold water?'

If the answer is yes, Brexiteers will say 'look, told you so - we'll be locked in forever'. People assume this anyway: we don't need legal advice to underpin the words in that 585 page document.

However if it says 'no, there is a way that we could break out in December 2020, by passing a law in the UK Parliament abrogating the Agreement at the end of the transition period', how could its publication in any way benefit the United

Kingdom? That information would be visible to all, including the European Parliament and all 27 countries who have yet to individually ratify the Withdrawal Agreement.

That's probably why the Government has rightly refused to publish, and let's hope Speaker Bercow will see how important it is not to disclose our negotiating position: and hold firm against that singularly unintelligent, but unanimously passed, motion asking for full publication.

The intelligent way forward is to approve the Withdrawal Agreement, work hard on the long-term trading relationship over the next two years, all the time ensuring that preparations are made for either a full free trade relationship as envisaged in the political declaration - or a clean break in December 2020. Then take the decision the end of the transition period, if necessary, by setting aside the Backstop at that time.

Over the past six months we've advocated this type of pragmatic but principled approach. Here are the links to our Brexit commentaries:

We've also provided ammunition for our negotiating team, including [an example of an open land border](#) in another part of the EU Custom Union. Only time will tell whether the Government has given way too easily at times, and I would say 'what does that matter now?'. We've got a transition period on the table. We have a decision from the people. And if we don't get out the European Union, the Eurozone will, for certain, collapse - as we will continue to stop EU political integration: which it desperately needs to make the single currency work.

So let's get on with it, members of Parliament. Vote for the Withdrawal Agreement: don't follow Lord North and his colleagues into the history books as one of the really stupid British Parliaments. And don't let Donald Tusk dictate the terms for a second referendum.

Gavin Oldham

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