

Brexit Talks Will Mean Hard Choices

Danuta Hübner | 22 March 2017

The Brexit negotiations mean hard choices will have to be made. Nobody can question the fact that, before or during the referendum campaign, there was no reflection on the consequences of leaving the European Union, especially those far-reaching, irreversible consequences, affecting people's lives for generations. As the British economy has not been doing badly over the last months, even experts live in fiction, confusing the impact of the referendum on the economy so far with the real impact of Brexit.

The question British citizens were responding to in the referendum was not about what really matters for people's lives. As a result, the government has chosen control of migration over the single market: control of migration in a time of full employment in the UK and a 'No' to the single market, which for decades has been the major driver behind British jobs, growth and competitiveness.

But I have no doubt that what we have to focus on today is to deliver Brexit intelligently, with a positive mind set, avoiding anything happening by accident. Avoiding that either side walks away from the negotiation table. There is a chance that we can achieve what I would call a good compromise. Our common Europe has always been about compromise-building. There is a risk that those who do not like to accept compromises might take such a compromise as a bad deal and follow the logic of the recently popular buzz line – 'no deal is better than a bad deal'. There is no deal worse than no deal. I can only hope that the UK will not take a good compromise as representing a bad deal. This would mean jumping off the cliff. Nobody would benefit.

On our, the European Union side, we are committed to spare no efforts to protect first and foremost the citizens, both those of UK and those of the remaining twenty seven member states of the Union. The European Union is the Union of citizens. This is in the Treaties. We have also taken note of the fact that UK citizens voted differently in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and also in Gibraltar, making it clear that the majority of them would wish to remain in the Union. It is difficult to imagine that those differences could be ignored and discarded in the process of Brexit. In the European Parliament, we represent all citizens of the European Union and will act throughout the whole process leading to the UK's withdrawal to protect their interests.

Of course, the EU position will have to stay within the boundaries of what is legally possible. The treaties give us guidance. And there are many options that can be offered to a European country, soon to be an ex-member of the Union, to maintain a relationship that would work for all of us. It is difficult, however, not to remind ourselves that the best of all those options is the one the UK wants to reject, membership of the European Union.

Without doubt, Brexit will make us all smaller in the global world which is increasingly unpredictable, full of conflicts, messy and dangerous. It will produce damage to all dimensions of our lives: economic, political, emotional. Our duty is to scale this damage down. But also the citizens of UK should use the negotiation process as a learning opportunity. The gap in understanding of how the European Union works, what leaving will really mean, what its logistics and costs will be, is enormous. Transparency of the negotiation process will help to understand

the challenge. Eyes might open, public debate might be encouraged, communities will listen and talk.

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