

The UK leaving the EU is no divorce and we certainly do not have to pay alimony

One of the more absurd analogies that pass for debate in the EU is that the EU and the UK need a divorce settlement. For a body which loves Treaties and lawyers it is bizarre. The Treaty makes no provision to require a departing state to pay an extra one off payment, nor does it seek or have any power over former states to carry on paying contributions. There is no need for lengthy negotiations on this obvious point. The answer to the request for a large one off financial contribution is No.

To make this a more interesting and longer article, I will however extend the divorce metaphor that so many like. Were this a divorce, it is between two high earning partners. The domineering husband, the EU, earns six times as much as his UK wife. He lives in a large suburban family home in Berlin, with a smart modern flat in Brussels. His wife has a country cottage in Wiltshire where she has retreated to as whenever they meet she just gets shouted at and told what to do. He has a large Mercedes. She drives a modern Mini.

Fortunately there are no children from the marriage. She is generously offering a clean break settlement to the husband to speed things up and to get on with her life, free of his endless demands for cash and obedience. It's none of her business that he has run up huge bills with his Greek affairs, as she did not agree to any of those and made clear her wish to keep out of it all at the time.

As the husband wishes to undertake the divorce in a foreign court and she intends to live under UK law it is difficult to see how the husband thinks he can carry on with his demands once his foreign jurisdiction no longer applies.

Heathrow expansion – Draft Airports National Policy Statement

The Government is currently seeking views on the draft the Airports National Policy Statement. Details of the consultation can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/heathrow-expansion-draft-airports-national-policy-statement>.

There are a number of consultation events taking place, such as one in Bracknell on Thursday 16 February 2017 at Carnation Hall. Further details are

available on the consultation page.

The established media peddle plenty of alternative facts

It is fascinating to see the traditional media wrestling with other ways of looking at the world. They don't seem to like competitive opinions. It is high time some of their own alternative facts were exposed to criticism.

The media regularly tells us that the Conservatives in government cut public spending. If you look at the figures you find that it climbed in real terms from £249bn to £292 bn under Mr Heath, from £326 bn to £437 bn under Mrs Thatcher and Sir John Major, and has risen again under Mr Cameron. (2011-12 constant price basis). The OBR forecasts further real growth this Parliament. The media instead usually takes a figure about the proportion of National Income, so that if the private sector grows faster than the state sector they can call this a cut! They never use the cash figures because these have surged.

The media also regularly tells us Sir John Major's government fell because the party was split on Europe. If you look at the polls you see the Conservative ratings plunged when the economic damage of the European Exchange Mechanism became clear when we were forced to abandon that crazy policy and never picked up. All the rows over Maastricht and the Euro made no difference to the poll ratings.

The media often present Treasury and Other consensus economic forecasts as if they were reality. They rarely ask why these bodies failed to forecast the Exchange Rate Mechanism recession, the Banking Crash recession or the Euro crisis. Now they should ask why these bodies did forecast a 2016-17 recession for the UK which visibly is not happening.

The media love running Big business threatens to pull out stories about their presence in the UK if we resist features of the EU. They ran these stories when we decided to stay out of the Euro and were wrong then. Now they run them about leaving the EU, and were wrong about the short term impact and will doubtless be wrong about the long term as well.

The collapse of Labour and Conservative sister parties in the Euro area

It looks as if neither the Republicans (Conservative) nor Socialists (Labour) will have a candidate in the last two to be French President. It looks as if a third force party run by Mr Wilders will be the top performing party in the Netherlands election in March. Syriza came from nowhere to be the largest party and form the government in Greece. Pasok (Labour) have no seats in the present Greek Parliament. In Italy Grillo's 5 Star Movement is well ahead of the two old main parties in the polls. In Spain Podemos and Ciudadanos have made huge inroads into the traditional centre right and left main parties, making it impossible for either to form a stable government easily.

I find it extraordinary that these once great governing parties of the post war world in Europe have given up their pre-eminence so easily. It shows just how out of touch they have become. The main driver of their demise and of the popular discontent seems to be the bad impact of EU austerity economics and the Euro on their economies. When a country has half its young people out of work and around a fifth of its entire workforce laid off, it is no wonder voters seek a better way. The traditional parties are either deaf to the entreaties of those who want change, or impotent to change the things that matter because they have locked themselves into the EU and Euro schemes.

Whenever a country gets into a predictable governing crisis owing to its fractured party politics the EU proposes a technocrat led coalition government following the Brussels rules. When a country votes for decisive change, as Greece did when it elected Syriza to government, the EU works to ensure there can be no positive change and redoubles its efforts to enforce the very policies that have led to the political explosion in the first place. Economic failure can lead to a cry for strict controls on the movement of people, and a sharper nationalist rhetoric, as people hit out in search of a solution to a problem which their EU loving rulers scarce admit exists.

It is one thing for the traditional parties to decline, as they are. It is another for a single strong challenger party to emerge and take over government. That so far has only happened in Greece, though it could happen elsewhere this year. It is an even more difficult thing for that challenger party to break free from the shackles of conventional EU politics and improve the outlook. So far Syriza has been unable to do that, owing to voter ambiguity about the Euro project.

Marine Le Pen is made of sterner stuff than Syriza. Were she to win she would take France out of the Euro and run an economic policy she thinks would change France for the better. The AFD in Germany want to take their country out of the single currency, and have recently defeated the two traditional parties in Land elections. They remain well behind Mrs Merkel's party in polls for a national election. Sgnr Grillo is playing on the growing

unpopularity of the Euro in Italy and may want to exit were he to win.

The ruling elite of the EU, with its single currency and panoply of Brussels controls, is on trial in this years elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and probably Italy too. The triumph of Brexit and Trump show there could be an upset for the ruling EU group in one or more of these. Meanwhile the Euro elite fasten their seatbelts and proceed with the same approach.

New houses and Grazeley

I was given some more information about the Council's possible project for a new town at Grazeley with 15,000 homes at a meeting on Friday. This is the project the Council is currently consulting about.

My comments included

1. Will the Council seek some guarantees that were it to go ahead at Grazeley there would be a direct reduction in pressure on other sites around the Borough?
2. What will the bid be for infrastructure investment? It would need to be large given the number of people who would go to live there.
3. What impact would 30,000 more cars have on the area? What extra capacity would be needed on our current highway network?
4. What would the impact of the railway plans be on Mortimer and on current rail use on that line?
5. How many primary and secondary schools will be needed – the indication is 5 and 2 – and is there provision for them?
6. What would the impact be on flooding and drainage patterns?
7. What extra provision will be needed for NHS and social care services?

Our infrastructure and public service provision is struggling to catch up with all the latest developments. Before committing to any major new project there needs to be detailed plans to tackle the extra required and to deal with the backlog.