**March 2019**

**The next referendum: EU minus versus Norway plus**

**Dave Morris**

**Climbing impossible mountains**

1. When the UK Parliament voted to invoke Article 50 they created an impossible mountain for the Prime Minister to climb, despite her well known navigation skills in the hills. No PM had any hope of negotiating a satisfactory bespoke withdrawal agreement from the EU within a two year time limit. The trade deals and other matters which underpin such deals take between five and ten years to negotiate, facilitated by the absence of any time limit.
2. The only sensible option available to the PM, given the time limit set by the Article 50 decision, was and still is, an “off the shelf” arrangement, plus or minus some key elements. Today most politicians now realise that the combination of the Article 50 decision with attempts to negotiate a bespoke deal within two years was bound to lead to huge difficulties. So it is now vitally important that they understand how a second referendum can resolve the resultant chaos, providing it is not a simple re-run of the first referendum.
3. The choice needs to be straightforward, easily understood and smooth to implement. Those who wish to vote should be asked to choose between two options. EU minus would ensure that we remained in the EU but out of the Common Agriculture Policy and European Fisheries Policy. Norway plus would remove us from the EU, but with the same relationship that Norway has with the EU plus remaining in a customs union with the EU.

**From Aaron Banks to re-unification and independence**

1. Anyone who still believes that the first referendum was a satisfactory demonstration of UK democracy at work is living on another planet. The final report of the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (18 Feb 2019) on Disinformation and “fake news” makes explicit reference to “the illegal influencing of the democratic process by foreign players”. The committee’s comments on the activities of Arron Banks, Steve Bannon, operations in Russia and the USA, concerns of the UK Electoral Commission and the ongoing criminal investigations by the National Crime Agency can only lead to one fundamental conclusion: the integrity of the 2016 Referendum process appears to have been very seriously compromised. Nobody, in March 2019, can have any really confidence that the result of that referendum truly reflected the voice of the people of the UK, as compared to the interests of rich individuals and powerful forces based in foreign countries.
2. Whatever decisions are taken by the UK Parliament in the closing days of March will subsequently have to be set within the context of future evidence and information, criminal investigation and concern over the integrity of the 2016 referendum process. It is inevitable that there will be growing scepticism, across all four nations of the UK, about the validity of the 2016 referendum if a significant part of that process was based on criminal activity, foreign power interference or other misdeeds. Such erosion of democratic integrity would surely erode confidence in the UK’s decision to leave the EU; such circumstances suggest that further public engagement through a second referendum, free from malign influence, is essential to restore credibility in the decision making process. Otherwise the case for a re-unification of Ireland and Scottish independence will have been strengthened immeasurably. These will be the only constitutional routes left for citizens in these countries to regain membership of the EU and negate the impacts of Aaron Banks and his associates.

**Does the CAP fit or is it “not fit for purpose”?**

1. It is astonishing to find that, in all this political debate about leaving the EU, no politician appears to have addressed the significance of the CAP. Long ago Margaret Thatcher led the successful world-wide efforts to close the hole in the ozone layer, a process helped by the fact she was both a PM and a trained scientist. When she applied similar pressure to the EU, however, she found a mountain too high to climb. After recognising that agricultural policy was the fundamental problem embedded within the EU, she embarked on a crusade to reform the CAP. She was furious to see that the CAP consumed most of the EU’s budget. Even today, despite some limited reform, it still costs 140 billion euros (£124 billion), nearly 40% of the overall budget. Its main purpose appears to be unchanged - to make rich landowners richer by intensifying production techniques in agriculture and forestry. The inevitable consequence is that biological diversity has been destroyed across vast swathes of Europe and the richest landowners are the main beneficiaries. We now recognise that modern agriculture is a major factor causing pollution of Europe’s air, land and water. The driving force that leads to these impacts is the CAP. It is a massive contributor to climate disruption. Despite prodigious efforts over many years by successive UK Governments and others to reform the CAP, it remains the biggest problem for every EU member state.
2. So, a second referendum is essential, providing both options result in the UK’s withdrawal from the CAP. If the UK remains within the EU withdrawal from the CAP will mean a significant reduction in its contribution to EU funds. But we will then be free, under both options, to design and fund new ways for supporting farmers, foresters and crofters to grow crops, rear animals and protect the environment. Each devolved nation would be able to deliver better economic, social and environmental outcomes which were specific to their part of the UK. A redirection of existing public funding for agriculture and forestry is the key to this process. The UK could become a leading European nation, in or out of the EU, for demonstrating how public subsidy for rural land use can play a major role in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

**Out of the CAP, even for the Royal Family**

1. Only with the UK leading by example in the reform of such subsidy regimes will the politicians in other European countries wake up to the need for immediate and fundamental reform of the CAP, or its abolition. For the UK to opt out of the CAP is perfectly feasible – opt outs of key policies by members states are an accepted part of EU practice: the UK is not a member of the euro zone, for example; Denmark has an EU derogation which allows it to opt out of the free market in land sales – only their own resident citizens are allowed to purchase land in Denmark. This is ironical, given that a Danish citizen arrived in Scotland 15 years ago and is now the country’s biggest landowner with over 220,000 acres (89,000 hectares) and fully entitled to CAP payments. Fortunately he is managing that land far better than most of Scotland’s other big landowners, including the Royal Family. They are all able to feast on the CAP, from the forests of Balmoral to the fields of Cornwall. Ending this bonanza, for all landowners, must be a top priority.

**Cross party consensus and citizen confidence**

1. Once a second referendum is confirmed, UK politicians must sit down together and decide, on a cross party basis, the criteria which define EU minus and Norway plus. They must then agree and publicise fact sheets which explain the core features of each of these options so that, this time, every citizen who votes knows what they are voting for. Both options would secure access to the single market, membership of the EU customs union and freedom of movement. The differences between these two options will define the essential features which most people now realise separate those who want to remain within the EU and those who want to leave. Freedom of movement, however, is guaranteed under both options. Nevertheless constraints on freedom of movement are increasingly being implemented in other European countries and this trend is likely to continue, to the UK’s benefit.
2. Finally it needs to be explained to the EU that it is

 necessary for Article 50 to be extended for two main

 reasons: to give time for the UK to conduct a second

 referendum and for EU officials to determine exactly

 what processes have to be followed and agreements

 made to implement either option. That EU exercise

 needs to be completed and signed off by the European

 Parliament before the date on which the second

 referendum takes place. This ensures that citizens who

 vote in the referendum are confident that, whichever

 option they vote for, both the UK Government and the

 EU will be committed to its speedy implementation.

 Such an outcome, whatever it is, is likely to command

 widespread support, even from those who vote for the

 losing option. All citizens will know that, at long last,

 our politicians have used a fair, equitable and

 understandable process to arrive at a decision which is

 based on proper democratic principles and procedures.

--------------------------