

CBS Roadshow

By Professor Alex de Ruyter

As Brexit continues to dominate media coverage not just in the UK, but around the world, we at the Centre for Brexit Studies want to hear the views of those within Leave voting areas about how they feel about the process and the reasons they voted the way they did. We are leaving the EU, not remaining within it and we want to hear from those who most strongly voted to leave to see if they feel our politicians are delivering the Brexit they voted for. We believe there are very few academics who are taking this unique approach.

As a Centre, we have had a lot of pro-Remain voices come forward to visit us and offer to speak at events, but we want to make sure the views of those who want to see us Leave the EU are heard and understood, particularly now we are almost 18 months on from the vote. The primary purpose of our roadshow is to listen to voters' voices. We can't do this by sitting in our offices in Birmingham. As part of the roadshow and in the spirit of offering practical advice in a post-Brexit world, we are going to offer updates on the Brexit process which local people and businesses may find helpful. Again, very few people are offering this and these sessions will follow a similar format to those we've been delivering in the West Midlands. This includes the forthcoming offer of a PG Cert in Trade Policy, designed for businesses who trade, or want to trade, internationally.

It's now been seven months since the establishment of the Centre for Brexit Studies here at BCU, a period which has seen the enactment of the Article 50 withdrawal process from EU membership, a UK Westminster election that defied most pundit predictions of a "Tory landslide" to see the Government lose its majority in the House of Commons and having to do a deal with the DUP to stay in power, and now the current scandal around the alleged conduct of some MPs which has already seen the resignation of one Cabinet member in Sir Michael Fallon. The prospect of trade deals outside the EU look difficult, as the comments made by the US Commerce Secretary, Wilbur Ross recently, that the UK will need to drop current food standards and accept importing chlorinated chicken if it wants a "trade deal" with the US serve to illustrate.

The turnaround in the Government's fortunes have been stark since the outcome of the June 23rd 2016 referendum that saw the resignation of the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and his replacement by Theresa May, who sought to provide "strong and stable leadership" and stated that "Brexit means Brexit". In contrast to predictions in 2016 by the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, David Davis, that a deal with the EU would rapidly be concluded, negotiations remain stuck in phase 1, with agreement yet to be reached on the EU's "red line" issues of the Northern Ireland border, rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and the size of the "divorce bill" facing the UK.

Now, at the time of writing this column, we have the Government under pressure to release the findings of 58 reports analysing the likely effects of Brexit on different sectors of the UK economy (although the Government has contested this, arguing that the reports don't exist as separate publications, and so will take weeks to release), with the Speaker, John Bercow, giving the Government until Tuesday November 14th to release these assessments. With only 50 negotiation days remaining at the time of writing, we are still no further in gaining any clarity as to what our future trading relationship with the EU will be, and senior European political figures have indicated that the UK Government needs to make more concessions to move negotiations on.

Yet public opinion has shown little sign of shifting much since the June 23rd referendum last year, with YouGov's polling (average of five most recent polls) suggesting that 45% of people thought we were wrong to leave the EU, as opposed to 43% saying that we were right to leave the EU (with the corresponding figures for the average of the first five polls being 42% and 46% respectively^[1]).

It is in this context then that we here at CBS want to hear your views on the current situation arising out of our Brexit negotiations. Should we leave without a "deal"? Would you still vote the same way now or have things changed? What particular concerns do you have over the economy? Do you think the Government is handling negotiations well?

We will be conducting a "roadshow" over the next few weeks to visit those parts of the UK that strongly voted to "leave" so that we can get

a better idea of what people's thoughts and concerns are now. Given that the vote to leave the EU has been widely interpreted in popular media as a "cry by those left behind by globalisation", we would like to know if this is a fair perception? The places we will be visiting include Walsall, Stoke, Doncaster, Hull, Grimsby, Boston, Great Yarmouth, Basildon and Clacton, in which we will have public forums where people can come and express their views. We will also talk to local businesses about key economic issues facing them.

If you are interested in attending one of these events, please visit the [events page](#).

Reference(s):

[1] <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/10/27/there-has-been-shift-against-brexit-public-still-t/>