

Brexit? What Brexit? Anti-Climax as Britain Leaves EU

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It's January 31st and Brexit is upon us. The day many thought would never come is finally here. But far from the pomp and circumstance that could have been expected from No.10, the affair itself looks pretty low-key. Ironically, after years of Brexit dominating the media headlines, Britain's actual exit from the EU is something of an anti-climax. Nigel Farage, you can be sure, will have his champagne ready, his Union Jacks flying (and a party set for parliament square) but Boris Johnson's preparations are nothing more than a pre-recorded speech, to be broadcast at 11pm, and a 'countdown clock' which is to be beamed on to 10 Downing Street in the final hours.

It's hardly surprising however that the government has chosen this low-key approach. Brexit is an issue that remains deeply divisive. Half the country will be in mourning tomorrow, as the UK's future out of Europe is shrouded in uncertainty. Boris Johnson may have won the December election on a mandate to 'Get Brexit Done' but it's far from being an oven-ready Brexit deal. There are still many details needing ironed out. Take travel, for instance. Brits are still unclear as to what Brexit will mean for their travel plans. According to research by the ABTA, 31% are unsure about how Brexit will affect their future travel. Hits to their Brexit advice page have increased by 376% as people try to get what information they can. Previously, with a No Deal Brexit looming, the government had stated that people would need at least six months left on their passports to be able to travel to the EU after Brexit. This advice has now been replaced with assurances that until December 2020, travel arrangements with the EU should remain the same. All in all, there is a sense of complete confusion as so little information has been provided by the government on this key issue.

Efforts have gone into other more controversial endeavours – such as the minting of a new coin to commemorate Brexit. With an alarming cost of £11.5 million to the taxpayer (in addition to the £100 million advertising campaign launched for the expected No Deal Brexit which was due to take place on October 31st, but never did), several prominent figures have declared they will boycott the coin completely. Tony Blair's former spin doctor Alastair Campbell, an ardent Remainer, said that the message the coin bears – 'Peace, Prosperity and friendship with all nations' – goes against everything that Brexit stands for. But despite the angst to be felt by EU supporters tomorrow, as has been pointed out by several commentators already, the fact is that there are no Remainers now -we are all Leavers.

Nevertheless, all is not quite so straightforward, as another threat to Johnson's post-Brexit stability is looming: Scottish independence. On Brexit day, celebrations down south will be contrasted not only with vigils north of the border, where Brexiteers are in the minority, but with a speech due to be made by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, setting out her 'next steps' for a second referendum on Scottish independence. Sturgeon's request last month for

powers to be transferred to the Scottish parliament in order to call a second vote on leaving the Union were denied by Boris Johnson, who must surely have thought that would be an end to the matter. But to think this would quell the independence movement is naive on his part. As Sturgeon herself has indicated, the less cooperative Westminster is, the more determined indyref2 supporters become. The EU flag is to be kept flying at the Scottish parliament for the time being, it was decided this week, and Scottish politicians voted again on Wednesday to “reassert the principle that it is the right of the people of Scotland to determine their future”.

Scotland is not going to give up the fight for self-determination any time soon. The Brexit furore may have subsided, but further divisions lie ahead for the United Kingdom as the battle for Scottish independence ensues and the other nations of Wales and Northern Ireland begin to reevaluate their positions in the Union. Far from resolving the Brexit issue, the withdrawal deal forged by Boris Johnson is only a temporary plaster on a deep wound in Britain’s side. The real story of Brexit is only just beginning as Britain begins a new life outside the EU, for which many of the rules have not yet been written. Let the Brexit experiment commence...

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