

We must stay strong in face of Brexit turbulence

AS somebody who advocated Remain in the EU referendum, I have deep respect for the result and enduring faith in democracy so conclude that cancelling Article 50 would be a betrayal of Brexit voters in the North East.

As a Remain advocate I have come to change my mind and can see the opportunities to the UK outside the EU; unlike many I don't cling to the arguments that failed in 2016, nor do I support those who want to find ways of frustrating the referendum result.

In my head I can accept that – despite the short term turbulence and instability – leaving the EU on WTO terms will not wreck Britain.

But I am also a realist and can see that there are not enough votes in Parliament to leave with No Deal and that those Brexit MPs who have become so ideologically attached to No Deal risk losing Brexit.

That is why, despite the turmoil, I believe it is still worth sticking with Mrs May. Her first response to the massive loss on Tuesday night was to reach out to those with whom she disagrees and invite them to talk to her; Jeremy Corbyn's first response was to try to smash her to bits by going for a vote of no confidence. She put the country first, he put his party first.

There should be confidence in the Government because, when the Brexit issue is parked, there has been some serious progress in other economic areas.

The UK deficit is down; income tax has been cut; record numbers of people are in work; the credit crunch has been tackled and business has greater access to finance; more homes are being built (the number of new-build home starts in England was up 12 per cent in the quarter ending September 2018); devolution is enabling areas like Tees Valley to power ahead with critical investment and will be coming to the North of Tyne soon.

There are lots of reasons for confidence and one giant fly in the ointment; Brexit.

It is easier to say what you are against than to say what you are for and then to compromise. I found myself sympathising with the concerns of the region's Business 4 EU group this week, but

Graham Robb



> Prime Minister Theresa May is under pressure, but worth sticking with



fundamentally disagreeing with their stance of a so-called People's vote; another referendum would only create more uncertainty, disrespect the voters of 2016 and, unless it's fixed and undermined by a quirky question, could well result in another 'Leave' vote – thus wasting everyone's time.

There are as many factions in the business community as in the rest of the population. I know numerous Brexiteers in business.

I was personally in favour of Mrs May's compromise deal, and there are lots of people who want a customs union arrangement.

The best use of time in business is spent preparing for different outcomes rather than hand wringing about our politicians, no matter how justified that is!

The politicians must now to stretch every sinew to reach a deal that is compatible with leaving the EU – Mrs May's deal (and I read it)

“

There are lots of reasons for confidence and one giant fly in the ointment; Brexit

Graham Robb

did provide a staging post for leaving, but fell at the great hurdle of the Irish backstop.

Adopting many of its contents in a structured 'No Deal' exit would certainly cushion the worst case No Deal scenario.

It might be possible, to leave without a formal deal but to have a 'pay-as-you-go' transition, whereby trade and customs arrangements continue while meaningful negotiations take place on a future free trade agreement. A bit like a member of staff leaving a business, then coming back on a freelance basis to fill the gap – being paid, playing by the business rules but not trapped in the business beyond their willingness to stay.

More dramatically, perhaps we should adopt the time honoured EU way of reaching deals, through a long summit meeting effectively by locking our political leaders in a negotiating room until the early hours of the morning, and letting proximity, privacy and exhaustion force them into a compromise. The Catholic Church chooses Popes in private conclave, and that proves an effective way of forcing agreement!

Whatever the outcome of the next few weeks, we should be resilient to the turbulence and uncertainty that surrounds us. As Charles Darwin once said: "It is not the strongest or most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change."

■ Graham Robb is Senior Partner in Recognition Public Relations

Society needs the foxes as well as the hedgehogs

Neil Walker



IN schools we look to prepare our young people for the world they will find when they leave us. Many people are told the key to getting a good job is to get a good degree from a good university. There are currently more than 400,000 undergraduates at Russell Group universities. Over 70% of them will get a 2:1 or better degree. That's over 93,000 people a year graduating from a Russell Group university with a top degree. The problem? There aren't that many openings; so how do businesses differentiate? Or more importantly, if you are one of those graduates, how do you make yourself distinctive?

There is a Greek poem by Archilochus that includes the phrase "a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog one important thing". This refers to a morality tale where a hedgehog and a fox are arguing about which is cleverer when they see a pack of dogs coming over the hill. The fox says that it knows 101 ways to escape but the hedgehog says it only knows one. As the dogs arrive, the fox is still deciding which of its tricks it will use to escape and is killed but the hedgehog curls up into a ball and is safe.

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin used this idea, somewhat frivolously, to divide writers and thinkers into two categories: hedgehogs, who view the world through the lens of a single defining idea (Plato, Dante or Dostoevsky), and foxes, who draw on a wide variety of experiences and for whom the world cannot be boiled down to a single idea (Aristotle, Shakespeare). Foxes have many thoughts and ideas at the same time, are more cautious, and inclined to see nuance. Foxes pursue multiple goals and see the world in all its complexity, trying to understand experiences for what they are. Hedgehogs, on the other hand, simplify the world into a single, central vision from which they can explain everything they do or see. It doesn't matter how complex the world is; a hedgehog reduces all challenges and dilemmas to simple ones. Anything that does not somehow relate to the hedgehog idea holds no relevance.

In his book "Good to

Great", Jim Collins suggested that hedgehogs succeed better in business, and possibly in life! He argued that foxes pursue many goals and interests at the same time. As a result, their thinking is scattered and unfocused and ultimately, they achieve very little.

Hedgehogs, however, are single minded and simplify the world; focusing on, and driving towards their ultimate purpose, they achieve success by ignoring or removing anything irrelevant. If you try to be too many things you will do none of them well but if you can ignore the distractions and remain purely focused on the task in hand you are likely to succeed.

An alternative view was posited by the Nobel prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman in his book "Thinking Fast & Slow". He suggests that foxes are complex thinkers who can recognise that reality emerges from the interactions of many different things. One of his key messages is that humans are inherently lazy when it comes to thinking. We jump to conclusions and, because our minds like to simplify our world, we are happy to blindly follow and believe anyone who acts like an expert. In classic hedgehog fashion we often follow or elect anyone who sounds confident and makes big promises. We want to believe someone strong and confident will take care of all the problems.

Unfortunately for the hedgehogs amongst us, the world is much more integrated and complex than they can imagine. A life can't be described as happy unless we have good health, relationships, work, etc. In the 21st century we need to develop a sense of the bigger world we all live in.

Schools have been fighting against the idea that there is a single measure to define success for years. League tables have been a threat to student learning as much as a way of improving it. Students need the opportunities to experience success and failure in school, the chance to take part in activities and events with people who are different, who have different ideas and approaches. Their thinking needs to be challenged because if this country is to succeed in the future, we need more foxes.