BLOCKING BREXIT WILL BOOST THE FAR-RIGHT

-   23.09.2019

EU Observer (23 September 2019)

Much has been discussed about the risks of carrying out Brexit.

Remainers predict that Britain will stand as a lonely island in its European neighbourhood 	 an isolated nation-state in an international system composed of what Guy Verhofstadt calls "empires", such as the United States, China, and India.

Britain's businesses will no longer benefit from unfettered trade with EU member-states, with its diplomatic clout weakened, deprived of being part of the broader European collective which helps to amplify its political voice on the global stage.

Internally, a disruptive withdrawal from the EU could also inject serious momentum into the independence movement in Scotland, which returned a Remain vote (in the Brexit referendum) of 62 per cent.

These are of course perfectly legitimate concerns 	 indeed, they go some way towards explaining why I voted to Remain in the June 2016 vote.

But while anti-Brexit politicians enthusiastically warn us of the potentially negative economic and diplomatic effects of leaving the EU 	 particularly on a no-deal basis 	 they are completely silent on the domestic social and political risks attached to overturning the Leave result.

UK head of counter-terrorism Neil Basu has warned that the far-right is the fastest-growing threat in the UK. This will only gather pace if political efforts to thwart Brexit continue to persist.

A recent report published by the Henry Jackson Society which focused on Britain's young eurosceptics, delivered findings which should be of serious concern for counter-extremism agencies.

The characteristics most strongly associated with pro-Brexit sentiment among young people 	 male, lower socio-economic status, prioritising immigration as an important national issue, being sceptical of cultural diversity, and holding deeper expressions of "Englishness" 	 resemble the profile of "target groups" for the recruitment and mobilisation efforts of the far right.

And there is growing evidence of 'Brexit Betrayal' rhetoric being co-opted by far-right nationalist movements.

The reality is, if Brexit was to be overturned by a 'cartel' of pro-Remain parties, this would be a genuine gift for far-right organisations across the UK.

These extremist entities will seek to 'reach out' and grow their membership by primarily targeting young, politically disaffected, pro-Brexit working-class men who are anxious over immigration and the cultural diversity it has generated.

Wales and the North

This recruitment drive is likely to be at its most aggressive in the North East, provincial Midlands and working-class Wales traditional Leave-voting Labour heartlands which have been abandoned by the party on the matter of Brexit.

Indeed, recent figures show that by region, the highest percentage of far-right referrals to the government's terrorism-prevention programme was in the North East.

There are also growing concerns over the far-right taking hold in de-industrialised Welsh communities.

With political 'homelessness' and 'voicelessness' being important factors in delivering the Leave result back in June 2016, failure to carry out Brexit risks plunging such voters into a pool of disaffection – destroying any sort of faith they had left in their own democratic system.

For many of Britain's Leave-voting working-class people, their vote is all they have in a market economy which does not really work for them; in a society where power and influence is very much concentrated at the top.

If pro-Remain metropolitan sophisticates send a message that their vote is worthless and counts for nothing, in their own national democracy, then inevitably there will be social and political repercussions.

Feeling politically unrepresented and being completely dissatisfied with the democratic system, certain sections of 'Britain's unheard' will be more inclined to join the ranks of the far-right organisations who will be relentless in disseminating anti-establishment narratives of betrayal in Britain's Leave-voting, working-class communities.

One of the most telling stories of the referendum was the vote of many pro-Leave working-class folk winning the day trumping over the overwhelmingly pro-Remain interests of the political, business, academic, and legal communities, as well as large parts of the mainstream media.

For Brexit voters who do not habitually participate in democratic exercises and feel alienated from conventional politics, the Leave result provided them with a sense of personal political agency and influence. It gave them hope that they could change things over their own country's system of governance.

The most effective way to counter the anti-establishment narratives all too often peddled by the far right, is to prove to such voters that their vote does carry weight in Britain's democratic political community.

That if their chosen option in a UK-wide referendum wins by 1.3 million votes and four percentage points, it will be implemented by their elected representatives.

Mainstream British politicians have a responsibility to find ways how to counter the growing far-right extremist threat. Overturning Brexit will only serve to intensify it.

Kaynak/Source: