

Stop the exaggerations about Brexit

Most days I hear or read a news item that tells me something has happened because of Brexit, or something has happened despite Brexit. Usually the item has nothing to do with Brexit whatsoever, would have happened without the Brexit vote and would have been given a different explanation then.

Some of the media and political spin post Brexit were classic examples of fake news. The commentators, forecasters and journalists put on their dark Brexit glasses, and decided that anything bad which happened happened because of Brexit, and anything good which happened happened despite Brexit. They went out looking for negative stories. The property commentators and some of the valuers wanted to show commercial property was down 15-20%. The only problem was there were plenty of buyers and no sellers at such discounts. They wanted to show housebuilding declined and home prices fell. Apart from top end prices which had been in freefall ever since Mr Osborne's anti Non Dom anti dear property budget in April, home prices stayed up. Housebuilders, often gloomy themselves, had to report good levels of sales and expand their production to cater with rising demand. There were plenty of large company executives prepared to say they were worried and reviewing their investment in the immediate aftermath of the vote, but when actual news came out about investment it was of new investment being made in the UK to reflect the good levels of consumer and business demand.

So here's a thought for the gloomy commentators. Most of what is happening on jobs, inflation, investment, car buying, homeownership is nothing to do with Brexit. The price rises we have seen come from higher oil and commodity prices and are in line with similar rises in the USA and Germany which are not undertaking an exit from the EU. Just as joining the EEC did not lead to any increase in UK GDP, just as completing the single market did not lead to any increase in GDP, leaving it should not lead to any fall in GDP. I think leaving the EU is a most important political and constitutional event, but it is not for the UK much of an economic event. It is a bit bigger economic event for the rest of the EU, as they are the ones who will lose our contributions and need to secure their favourable access to our market which they use to such good effect at the moment.

Western Sahara: UN chief Guterres urges Morocco and Polisario Front to de-escalate tensions in buffer strip

25 February 2017 – Deeply concerned about increased tensions in the vicinity

of Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara between the Moroccan berm and the Mauritanian border, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today called on Morocco and Frente Polisario to take all necessary steps to avoid escalation.

According to a statement issued by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, armed elements of both Morocco and Frente Polisario (Polisario Front) remain in close proximity to each other, a position they have been in since August 2016, monitored during daylight hours by the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

The Secretary-General calls on both of the parties to exercise maximum restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid escalating tensions, be that through the actions of military or civilian actors, the statement said, adding that Mr. Guterres also underlined that regular commercial traffic should not be obstructed and that no action should be taken, which may constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip.

Strongly urging the parties to unconditionally withdraw all armed elements from the buffer strip as soon as possible, to create an environment conducive to a resumption of the dialogue in the context of the political process led by the UN, the Spokesman said Mr. Guterres further called on the parties to adhere to their obligations under the ceasefire agreement and to respect both the letter and the spirit of it.

Western Sahara is located on the north-west coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. The colonial administration of Western Sahara by Spain ended in 1976. Fighting later broke out between Morocco and the Polisario Front. A ceasefire was signed in September 1991. MINURSO was deployed that year to monitor the ceasefire between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front and organizing, if the parties agree, a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara.

A revised settlement plan was proposed by the United Nations after seven years of diplomatic consultations was rejected by one of the parties in 2004. In approving the current phase of direct negotiations in 2007, the UN Security Council called for a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political settlement which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

[UN Security Council calls for immediate investigation into recent violence in DR Congo's Kasai region](#)

25 February 2017 – The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned

the recent spate of violence in the south-central Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), calling on the Government to immediately dispatch a credible and impartial investigation.

In a press statement issued in New York yesterday evening, the Council expressed grave concern at the recent reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by local militia in that region, including unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, and of killings of civilians by members of Congolese security forces, known as FARDC, all of which might constitute war crimes under international law.

Recalling that the DRC Government bears the primary responsibility to protect civilians within its territory, the Security Council urged the authorities to constantly exercise maximum restraint and proportionate lawful use of force in its efforts to restore order.

The Council also called on the Government to immediately dispatch an investigation and to bring to justice and hold accountable all those responsible. Welcoming the Government's announcement in this regard, the Council encouraged the UN Stabilization Mission in the country, known by its French acronym MONUSCO, to provide support to the Congolese authorities, if requested, in the conduct of this investigation, developments in which they will follow very closely.

MONUSCO was further urged to monitor and report on violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and to update its contingency plans in this regard. In the longer-term, the Security Council encouraged the DRC Government to continue its efforts for the extension of State authority throughout the vast central African nation, ensuring credible governance with capable institutions, especially in the security sector, to prevent and deter violence.

RELATED: UN mission in DR Congo strongly condemns persistent violence in Kasai Provinces

As for the political situation in the country, the Security Council reaffirmed its strong support for the 31 December 2016 political agreement, and its pursuit of peaceful, credible, free, fair and inclusive elections by December 2017, leading to a democratic transfer of power.

In this context, the 15-nation body said it is increasingly concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the dialogue among the political stakeholders in DRC related to implementation modalities of the agreement. The Council expressed concern that, two months after the signing of the agreement, the appointment of a Prime Minister presented by the *Rassemblement* coalition, as well as the installation of a new transitional government and of the *Comité National de Suivi de l'Accord* (CNSA) have yet to take place.

As such, the Council stressed the need to maintain the political goodwill that led to the signing of the agreement in order to avoid further insecurity in the DRC. Further, the Council called on all stakeholders in the DRC,

including President Joseph Kabila, the presidential majority and the opposition, to redouble, in good faith, their efforts towards a speedy conclusion of the ongoing talks on the *arrangements particuliers* of the agreement, in order to urgently nominate a Prime Minister presented by the *Rassemblement*.

The Security Council reaffirmed the need for all parties to support and participate constructively in the mediation led by the *Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo* (CENCO), and recalled that full and timely implementation of the 31 December agreement, in accordance with the Congolese Constitution and in line with Council resolution 2277 (2016), is critical in upholding the legitimacy of the transitional institutions until elections.

[East China hotel fire traps people](#)



Photo taken on Feb. 25, 2017 shows the fire site in a hotel in Nanchang, capital of east China's Jiangxi Province. The fire broke out Saturday morning, trapping an unknown number of people. [Photo: Xinhua]

A fire broke out in a hotel Saturday morning in Nanchang, capital of east China's Jiangxi Province, trapping an unknown number of people, authorities said.

The fire was spotted on the second floor of the HNA Platinum Mix Hotel in the Honggutan New District at about 8 a.m., firefighters said.

More than 10 construction workers were working on a decoration project on the second floor when the fire broke out, said a woman who escaped from the fire.

A man who broke the window to jump from the second floor was injured and rushed to hospital.

The four-story hotel is connected to a 24-story apartment building, where people are also found trapped, as Xinhua reporters saw on the site.

About 10 fire trucks are working to put out the fire.

[Blueprint for a better Beijing set](#)

Beijing should improve city planning and construction to build a "harmonious, world-class capital city" and better meet the demands of its residents, said President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Friday.

The city should take comprehensive measures to tackle problems that people care about most, such as air pollution, traffic jams, surging housing prices and too large a population, he said at a meeting after a two-day inspection.

Beijing should improve people's livelihoods and provide better public services for the people, he said while presiding over a high-profile meeting in the Great Hall of the People to discuss how to improve Beijing's city management and preparation work for the 2022 Winter Olympics.

"Whether its city planning and construction are good should be measured by how satisfied people are," he was quoted by China Central Television as saying.

During the two-day inspection tour, Xi visited the construction site of Beijing's new airport in the southern suburban district of Daxing and major stadiums that are to host Winter Olympics events.

He also visited Tongzhou district, the administrative sub-center of Beijing.

At the airport construction site, Xi urged workers and managers to adopt the strictest standards to ensure building quality.

Xi also stressed city planning and urged officials to study and devise

effective policies to ensure Beijing's sustainable development.

Beijing should stick to improving its core functions as the capital and move its non-capital functions out of the city to ease its population and environmental pressures, he said at the meeting.

On Thursday, Xi listened to a report by municipal departments on the traffic integration of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province.

The government put forward a national strategy in 2014 to promote coordinated development of the three regional economies so that the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region will grow into a major growth engine for the national economy.

Zhang Liqun, an economist of the State Council's Development Research Center, said, "The government now emphasizes development of city clusters, and megacities must help neighboring regions develop.

"In the next stage, integration of traffic and water and power supply systems will pick up speed."