

The BBC wants to change the news, not report it

Yesterday I was phoned to be asked onto the BBC Radio 4 Today programme this morning. They said they wanted me to answer questions about how the election would change the UK's ability to negotiate a good new relationship with the EU. I was happy to do so, and said I could make any time at their studio. It seemed like a good topic, and central to what the PM said about her reason for calling the election.

They then proceeded to ask me a series of questions all designed to get me to disagree with the UK negotiating position and Prime Minister. I explained that I supported the PM, agreed with her Brexit White Paper and stated aims, and suggested if all they wanted to do was to criticise her they should approach the Opposition parties. They continued to try to get me to disagree. They did not seem to have read the White Paper or the PM's speech on the topic, so I had to tell them what was in them and why I agreed with them.

I explained again that their thesis that the Leave supporting MPs were in disagreement with the PM and were "rebels" was simply untrue. We are not in disagreement with the PM and we have been strongly supporting the government's statements and legislation on Brexit. She said she would get back to me about the invitation to go on, with the details.

She did not of course bother to, as it was clear I was unwilling to feed their view of what the news should be.

I then found another Leave supporting Conservative MP had been given the same treatment, and he too had thought the BBC were trying to change the news rather than reporting the position. When I came to do a live interview on some other BBC programme I was faced with the same stupid thesis and had to explain on air how wrong their idea was.

I do not know who is feeding the BBC this nonsense, but it is frustrating that they do not accept the truth from those whose views they claim to be reporting, and do not bother to get back and openly say they do not want you on because you won't say what they want you to say.

Make the money central to the election

The Prime Minister rightly said we need to take back control of our money.

One of the important things the government can do in this election is to say Goodbye to the austerity economics of the EU budget rules and Mr Osborne's

tenure. One of the pleasures of Brexit, a positive for voters of all persuasions, will be the ability to spend the net contributions we currently send to Brussels. Once we are out we can offer tax cuts and more spending with no rise in borrowing. Spending the money at home will help our economy and put more of our people to work here, instead of having to send the money abroad and run a larger balance of payments deficit.

We could remove VAT on domestic fuel, tampons and green products. We could spend more on the NHS, training more UK people as nurses and doctors. We could spend more in our schools and do more to promote better roads and public transport.

June 8th General Election

The pound has risen against both the dollar and the Euro on news that Mrs May is seeking a new mandate to implement Brexit. The cost of government borrowing has also fallen, with bond prices rising.

She tells us "Britain is leaving the EU and there can be no turning back....The country is coming together but Westminster is not". She wants a mandate given the way the Opposition parties are behaving over the Brexit negotiations.

I look forward to the election, and assume Labour will also be running on a platform of wanting to make a success of Brexit.

Why the EU now dislikes Turkey

The EU is not happy with the results of the Turkish referendum. Some EU politicians argue the campaign was not properly conducted, with irregularities in voting, undue pressures on some voters and one sided media coverage heavily influenced by the government line. Many in the EU believe the changes will be bad for Turkish democracy, giving the President substantial new powers to govern without proper checks from Parliament and the courts.

This response is likely to harden those attitudes in Turkey which think the EU has been playing them along for too many years without allowing them to join the EU as full members. The first EEC/Turkey Association Agreement was signed in 1963. In 1970 the Customs Union was developed with Turkey, and more progress was made with a fuller document in 1992. The original aim was for Turkey to be a full member of the Customs Union, to be part of many common

policies, and to reach freedom of movement with the EU. In 2013 a worried EU signed a Readmission Agreement with Turkey to get Turkey to take back more people, and on March 18 2016 a wider ranging policy was signed to enlist Turkey's help in controlling migration across the Med.

The supporters of President Erdogan claim the referendum was fairly fought and conducted with plenty of outside vigilance and interest. They remind the many critics that the 18 changes to the Turkish constitution passed through Parliament with substantial majorities, typically around 340 votes in favour and 140 votes against on an Article by Article basis in a 550 seat Parliament. The changes include an extra 50 MPs, 5 yearly Parliamentary and Presidential elections, and a requirement for impartiality by judges. Parliament can pass a law to overrule a Presidential decree and can institute a Parliamentary review of the government. Judicial review is also introduced for government actions. The military courts are abolished.

His critics think he will have too much power through appointing and influencing judges, using the powers to rule by decree, and acting as the Leader of his political party. They seem to think he will be able to win a couple of elections easily to stay in government for the next decade. They do not rate the Parliament as an effective check on the new government.

The EU is making a mess of handling its relations with its neighbours to the East. Ukraine is badly split and damaged by civil war. Now Turkey is moving away from the EU's model of Association. What should the EU now do to make the situation better? What type of relationship is now realistic and desirable?

Parliament will be sovereign

Parliament can make mountains out of any molehill in the UK, once we have left the EU. It is curious that those most hostile to our departure from the EU now claim to be the most protective of the very Parliamentary sovereignty they so wantonly gave away. They need not worry. Out of the EU, Parliament can debate and vote on anything it wishes. It can hold government to account and change the law any day it likes.

The synthetic anger over the so called Henry VIII clauses in the Great Repeal Bill are just such a phoney war and a false tenderness towards the UK Parliament. The government has made clear that all substantive changes to EU laws, ranging from a new immigration policy to a new fishing policy, will of course need primary legislation. Parliament can shape and influence that to its heart content, in a way it could never do when the rules were laid down by the EU.

The so called Henry VIII powers, often used to drive through EU matters, will only be used for government to make technical changes to existing EU law to

make sure it does still work as UK law! That surely is something the Remain people should like, as presumably they welcome the continuity of much EU law as UK law.

It is a curious feature of the modern debate that the Remain supporters in Parliament want us to talk about nothing but Brexit the whole time, and then complain that we do not debate and vote on it enough. As one who welcomes Parliamentary scrutiny and debate on the use of power I have no problem with Parliament doing this. Parliament does, however, need to have some sense of balance and proportion. We need to complement the many hours of debate and scrutiny of the UK's position on Brexit with proper use of our powers in many other areas, and more debate of the needs and tactics of the rest of the EU.

It is fine for the Opposition to criticise or demand more of the government. It should also be the loyal Opposition, recognising the impact its words may have on the UK's position in the EU talks.