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Brexit: Way forward no clearer following UK general election

Julius Stobbs (Stobbs IP) · Monday, July 10th, 2017

With perhaps more of a gentle fizz than a bang, the Brexit negotiations finally got underway towards the end of last month. One might be forgiven for having missed this development, given the backdrop of a tragic fire in London and anger directed at the governmental response. Indeed, the outward glare held by many Britons has now been directed inwards, at those directly charged with running the country. Following the recent election, here is what we now know.

Contrary to multiple predictions (ahem), the Conservative Party were unable to secure a majority in the recent general election. Having called the snap election to accusations of capitalising on temporary goodwill, Theresa May (“the PM”) and her party won 318 seats, falling short of the required 326. This is compared to the 331 seats that they won in the 2015 election. As a result, the UK now has a hung parliament, meaning that the party which obtained the most seats must generate a majority by way of a coalition or *confidence and supply* arrangement. The Tories have recently agreed a deal with Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland to obtain this majority.

A key issue for the Brexit process is that the governing party (as presently constituted) now has fewer MPs in government, meaning that their ability to introduce legislation and progress the concepts within their manifesto may be more readily curtailed by the opposition. Despite a campaign based on the assurance of a *strong and stable* government, the election appears to have cast further doubt over the manner in which Brexit is to progress, since the power held by the PM has diminished.

We have heard that in terms of timings it would appear that trade talks will need to wait until matters including citizens’ rights and financial obligations are detailed. There was initially hope for parallel discussions, but this has been declined by Mr Tusk, President of the European Council.

Seemingly in response, the Government released a policy paper in June, confirming that they intend to offer a level of support to EU residents who have been lawfully resident in the UK for five years. These people may apply for *settled* status, which is geared towards providing something

akin to citizenship. Those who arrive in the UK after a certain date (TBC) will need to apply for an additional status. It would appear that this step has been taken in order to offer assurances to EU citizens in return for a similar situation for UK ex-pats. Whilst it remains to be seen whether this proposition is practicable, especially given the administrative burden of potentially having to assess c.3 million people for their residential status, it is clear that the UK government has accepted that the negotiations will necessarily hinge on a give and take, rather than the ‘have cake and eat it’ approach which they had appeared to be taking before the election.

It is worth noting that certain international agreements that bound the UK via the EU will remain effective. As an example, trade imports from 48 named developing countries (including India) will remain duty free. A priority, this observer would suggest, given that 79% of the tea consumed in the UK is imported from these very countries. As a British National, I can confirm that this is a serious volume of tea.

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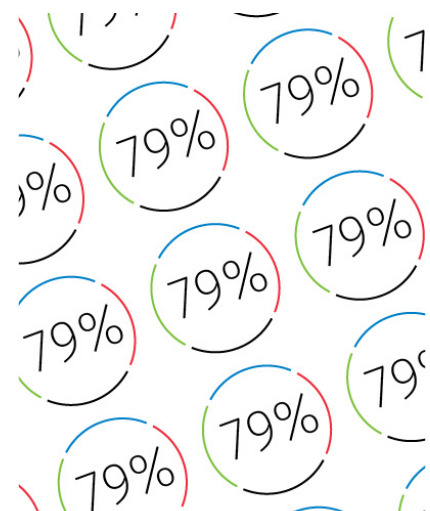
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