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“The British General Election will be decided more on domestic issues rather than the Brexit”

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1. According to the polls the Conservatives are ahead in terms of voting intentions. If this proves true might we expect a reorganisation of the Labour Party, even the replacement of Jeremy Corbyn?

The most recent polls show that the difference between the two main parties, the Conservatives and the Labour has shrunk. The Labour goes back up in the polls while remaining behind the Conservatives. Victory for the Conservative Party remains likely and in this case a reorganisation of the Labour Party will largely depend on the size of the defeat. If defeat is considerable, particularly if the Labour Party wins fewer votes than in 2015 (i.e. below the score achieved by Ed Miliband of 30.45%), I think it will be difficult for Jeremy Corbyn to remain as Labour leader. However, if the score is higher than two years ago, if the party's defeat is not as bad as first expected, Jeremy Corbyn may very well try to remain, by using a result that is not as bad as forecast.

2. This is the third vote for the British in under three years. Is it possible that the electorate is fatigued by this and that there will be rising abstention in the election on 8th June? What might the consequences be?

It not easy to say because the polls provide little information about this. But in effect we might imagine, because it is the third election in three years, and also because at the beginning of the campaign there was little suspense about the outcome, that the abstention rate might be slightly higher than in the previous one.

This said, even if it were the case, it would have very little effect on the election result. Abstention might affect Conservative voters, confident of victory and who will not bother to go to ballot, just as much as Labour voters, who are either sure that they will lose, or because they do not support Jeremy Corbyn.

3. In your opinion the vote will be decided more on domestic issues than the Brexit? Can we qualify this election as a “second referendum” on the Brexit?

Certainly not, because as the campaign started Europe was very much on the side-lines. As is often the case, and here we return to a traditional scenario, it is really issues of domestic policy, both economic and social, that are dominating the campaign. It is even rather surprising that Brexit has been relegated to backstage in comparison with domestic policy issues when we think of how much this represents. The only ones who are using the issue are Theresa May and the LibDems. On the one hand Theresa May explains that she needs a strong majority to be in a strong position to negotiate with Brussels. It has not featured greatly in her campaign, but she does mention it. And on the other, the LibDems, who are pro-European, dream of a second referendum, but enjoy extremely minimal electoral influence. The Labour Party, for its part, has hardly even mentioned it.

4. The LibDems, who want another referendum on leaving the European Union are rejecting any coalition with the Labour Party. Is it not a mistake given the weight of the Conservative

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Party? Wouldn't the mobilisation of the vote of pro-European Britons against the Conservative Party lead to a new referendum over Brexit?

I really do not believe in this. Firstly, because I do not have much faith in going back to try again, which some pro-Europeans from the Labour Party and the LibDems are calling for. Many historic, political and electoral reasons mean that this is extremely difficult to foresee. Moreover British public opinion is tired, including those who voted to remain in the EU. Many have now accepted the result and believe that the issue at stake is now to find a good agreement with the EU. Things can change over the next few years but for the time being there is no inkling of a grassroots movement in public opinion that would then be fed by a part of the political class in favour of a second referendum.

5. Would a stronger parliamentary majority for Theresa May really give her greater weight in the negotiations with the European Union?

Theresa May believes that if she has a bigger majority she would be less at the mercy of the minority branches of her party, whether these are the few anti-Brexit members of the Conservative Party or the more radical pro-Brexit wing. But in reality I do not believe that this will make any great difference. Theresa May already has an electoral mandate and the other Member States each have their own electoral mandate. Having to face a Prime Minister who has a 50 seat majority, give or take a few seats, will not have any significant impact on the content of the negotiations. What will really be important is the negotiation position that the British government takes in Brussels and the response on the part of the other Member States, rather than the size of Theresa May's majority.

6. Jean-Claude Juncker declared that the “real political negotiations over Brexit would start after the elections on 8th June”. What possible negotiation scenario are there depending on the election results?

I do not believe that the election results will really be vital or hold any strong sway over the negotiations. The

negotiations will have their own dynamic, which will depend on attitudes on either side; on the one hand that of Theresa May's government and David Davis, the British Minister responsible for these negotiations and on the other that of Michel Barnier, the European Commission and Member States' representative. There will be no difference whether the Conservative Party has a 20 seat majority, more or less. It is the negotiation strategy and the will to come to an agreement and to find compromises which will be crucial, and not the election results – except of course, against all expectations – the Conservatives lose these elections.

7. These elections have been convened whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland are unstable (Scotland, due to its request for another referendum on independence and Northern Ireland, due to the political crisis that has deprived it of a government for the last three months). Do they not risk accelerating an “implosion” of the UK?

This is the challenge of the next few years, and more for Scotland rather than Northern Ireland. The question was more complicated a year ago. We felt then that the vote to quit the European Union would quickly lead to a second referendum on Scotland's independence, which at the time would have been more likely to have been in favour of independence. However, a year on, we see that in reality, in spite of the result in Scotland there has not been a strong grassroots movement either to remain in the European Union, nor for the independence of Scotland, contrary to the hopes of the secessionists in office. In Scotland the polls regarding independence have hardly changed since the 2014 referendum, with around 53% still against independence. Nicola Sturgeon's logic, which was to say that the “Scots voted to remain in the EU, therefore Scotland needs a referendum on independence to remain” does not seem to be followed by a majority of Scottish opinion. Moreover, since Theresa May rejected the organisation of a second referendum of this nature before the UK's exit of the EU at the end of March 2019, the situation is in deadlock right now. This does not mean that in five, ten or even 15 years' time things will not change but for now, in the short term, an independent Scotland

does not seem a possibility.

8. Nicola Sturgeon has called on the electorate to “protect Scotland” from the Tories. Do you think that these elections will help the Scottish National Party (SNP) to maintain its hegemony in Scotland and to assert itself in the face of the British government?

The SNP will probably maintain its hegemony, but for the time being the polls show a relative recovery of the Conservative Party in Scotland. This is a surprise, since traditionally Labour occupied rather more the political arena. We are moving towards a duo, secessionist on the one hand, the Conservatives on the other, but which would remain more to the secessionists’ advantage. They might lose a few seats but they totally dominate for the time being. Even if they lose some seats on 8th June, this will not damage their dominant position in Scotland for the time being.

9. 56% of the Northern Irish voted against the Brexit in the referendum and the European Council maintained that if Ireland reunified the country would automatically become a member

of the European Union. Does the fear of leaving the Union, added to that of seeing a rekindling of conflict and a hard border between Ireland and Ulster, make a scenario of the island’s reunification credible?

The issue of Northern Ireland is totally different from that of Scotland. It is due to a problem of the end of conflict and the management of peace re-found, which was achieved under the aegis of the EU. Moreover there is the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which will become the EU’s border. Some Northern Irish nationalists have pleaded for the island’s reunification, so that Northern Ireland can remain in the EU. But for the time being there have only been a few passionate declarations. There is no grassroots movement on the part of public opinion – which is vital – or on the part of the political elites, whether this is in the north or the south, in support of reunification. This does not mean that in 10 or 15 years’ time things will not have changed but for the time being, one year after the referendum we have not reached that point yet. Debate is rather more focused, including in Brussels, on the type of border between Ireland and Ulster.

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