

CITY A.M.

It is up to Britain – not the EU – to decide whether Brexit is a success

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How can we judge whether Brexit has been worth it by, say, 2020? That has been a question doing the rounds on [Twitter](#).

Are there any economic measures we can assess? Growth? Real GDP per head? The number of trade deals signed? The impact on British regions? Perhaps we should simply view outcomes against the declared aims of Vote Leave? One pro-Remain journalist claims we should use Vote Leave's "Take Back Control" slogan as our guide. In a post-Brexit world where we decided to cede control of some regulations within the new free trade agreements we had negotiated, on this reading Brexit should be labelled a failure.

This approach misses the point. The reason why so many Remainers are so enthusiastic about these arbitrary short-term metrics, many of which can be affected by a host of other macroeconomic factors, is to prove that it was all a mistake.

But how do you quantify rule by parliamentary democracy? Brexit was a constitutional decision to repatriate a range of powers. What the electorate was deciding was simply that we should exit the European Union. Despite attempts from politicians of all parties to project onto us what we supposedly think, there is no objective or unifying agreement between Brexiteers on how those powers should be exercised within domestic politics, let alone estimates of the outcomes of policies. Indeed, the main goal of Brexit was that these decisions should be made here, debated on and voted through Parliament and General Elections.

That's what made the declaration that "Brexit will never be a success" by Jean-Claude Juncker's aide [Martin Selmayr](#) last week so arrogant and misguided. It simply is not within the EU's gift to decide whether Britain's future outside of the EU is a success or not, as the examples and experiences of many advanced countries outside the EU show. The success of our governments will be decided by the policies and approaches they adopt, and will be judged by voters at General Elections.

Of course, the EU can play a big role in shaping whether [Theresa May](#) is successful in the narrow sense of negotiating her desired free trade deal with the EU, and maintaining security cooperation and so on. But in the longer term, Britain's economic fortunes and priorities have little to do with Brussels. That was the whole point.

Rather than ask whether Brexit was a success or failure, the real question outside the EU will be how to make Britain successful – the kind of question that implicitly underpins all political debate anyway, only now with Britain with more policy levers. Each government, political party

and voter will have different views on this, and any judgement will be subjective, made by us as individuals, rather than objective truth.

For me and many others, Brexit was an opportunity to move Britain further in the direction of economic liberty and to try to make Britain more economically dynamic. I will consider Britain to be more successful outside of the EU if we lower and abolish a range of the tariffs the EU currently imposes on our behalf, pursue free trade vigorously, introduce a liberal framework for migration, abandon the EU's agricultural protectionism, and seek to revise and refine a host of the EU's regulations.

Do I expect all of this to happen? Certainly not. Would I have voted to leave the EU if I knew for sure that none of this would be achieved ever? No. But as a result of leaving the EU, we do have the opportunity to pursue all of these ambitions. On average, the calculation that many of us made was that accountable government will tend to produce better results than rule by distant elites.

The point is that Brexit comes with both risks and opportunities for those of us who voted for it. Each year government does a plethora of things which upset or disappoint us, and which we oppose. The last hundred years has shown a host of economic disasters, not least the huge nationalisations after the Second World War, and the stop-go demand management policies which resulted in the stagflation of the 1970s. In the coming years, any domestic policy mistakes or any economic downturn will be blamed on Brexit, purely as a result of the timeline.

But the democratic process has also produced huge improvements in policy, from the privatisations of the 1980s, through to Bank of England independence and supply-side reforms that have improved the resilience of our labour market.

While it might seem a cop out to those who want to hold we Leavers to account, the success of Brexit is precisely that many more decisions will be made domestically again. And if they do not like them, they can push for change like the rest of us.

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