

The EU's attempt to exact First World War-style revenge will only make Britain more united



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There is a new divide in Britain, courtesy of Jean-Claude Juncker, Michel Barnier, Angela Merkel and the other Euro-bullies.

Forget Leavers or Remainers: the real, unbridgeable split is now between those who are outraged by the Eurocrats' preposterous demands and those who, shamefully, have decided to take the EU's side.

The good news is that if the country was divided 52-48 per cent last June, it would surely be united 80-20 per cent on the basis of this new litmus test.

The first group includes most Remain voters: they may have disagreed with Brexit but quite naturally want the best for Britain and are furious at the EU's blatant aggression.

Its latest preposterous demands – that we should hand over €100 billion for the privilege of regaining our self-government and that we can, in effect, never really leave – are so belligerent, so absurdly punitive that they will be remembered as a seminal moment in the hardening of British opinion.

The feedback from friends this week has been striking. All over the country, ex-Remainers are finally moving on, in some cases even switching sides as a result of the shenanigans of the past few days.

The penny has suddenly dropped: the EU is acting in exactly the anti-democratic, menacing way that so many Eurosceptics had warned about.

The British, regardless of their politics, don't like jumped-up bureaucrats putting a gun to their head. The Prime Minister's intervention on Wednesday will thus have been cheered by millions of patriotic voters of all parties and none.

The second group is small and disproportionately made up of the Twitterati liberal elites, many of whom have been openly jubilant at the EU's clumsy anti-May briefings.

There are Remainian ultras who want to prove that Brexit was a historic mistake, even if that means unnecessarily damaging the British and eurozone economies; there is also an even more extreme wing who appear to dislike Britain so much that they want us to be crushed. Such folk may as well be Eurosceptic sleeper agents: the louder they shriek, the greater Mrs May's majority.

It is not the British government that is living on another planet but the Europeans, or at least those briefing the anti-Brexit media. I have always resisted falling into the

old trap of endless Second World War analogies: they make it impossible to have a sensible discussion.

But I'm finding it increasingly hard to avoid concluding that the EU is actually engaging in a bizarre attempt at reenacting the settlement that followed the First World War: the €100 billion figure is so extreme, so devoid of any rational basis or genuine legal logic that it must be seen as an attempt at imposing reparations on Britain. We are guilty of crimes against the European dream, and must therefore face cruel and unusual punishment.

This is a shocking state of affairs, not least because of what it tells us about the increasingly delusional state of mind of many in Brussels (and even some in Germany), who see us as some sort of weak, vanquished foe ripe for the clobbering.

The last time this sort of idiocy was attempted was in 1919, at the Treaty of Versailles, when a defeated Germany was ordered to accept full responsibility for the war and to pay vast reparations to the allied powers.

A "Reparation Commission" was set up, and Germany was told to pay an immediate 20 billion marks in gold, commodities, ships, securities and other assets, while accepting occupation, oversight and endless humiliations.

John Maynard Keynes called it a Carthaginian peace, likening it to the total subjugation imposed on that Tunisian city-state by Rome. He decried France's revanchism, and its obsession with extracting tributes from the Germans, and rightly predicted that the whole affair would end in tears in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.

History never repeats itself, of course, and we are a successful, powerful nation that won't be bullied by anybody. But the fact that Juncker is even trying it on should serve as a reminder that the Eurocrats are out of their depth, intellectually as well as practically; far from being accomplished negotiators, they are pathetic amateurs desperate to conceal the fact that they are terrified that the British cash will soon run out. Their arguments are bogus.



The EU isn't a force for economic freedom. It keeps demonstrating its mercantilism, and explicitly sees trade as a one-way favour, a privilege in return for which money and control (via European-imposed rule and the jurisdiction of its court) must be surrendered.

In reality, trade is always mutually beneficial, and no other "trading block" charges a "fee" for access. The fact that Barnier and his gang want to make us "worse off" by imposing protectionist barriers on UK firms expose them as economic illiterates with no interest in free markets.

Juncker and his chief of staff, Martin Selmayr, are also reading from the wrong tactical playbook. The UK isn't a bankrupt nation like Greece, [dependent on handouts from the EU and endless cash injections from the European Central Bank](#); and neither are we an impoverished applicant nation, forced to grovel in the hope of joining the club.

We are a G7 economy with employment [at an all-time high](#), and are massive net contributors to the EU budget. It would be painful to walk away without a deal but all sides, not just us, would suffer. The trouble is that the Eurocrats, who remain minnows on the world stage, have no idea how to negotiate with a proper adversary, and don't seem to grasp the downsides for the EU from a breakdown in relations.

British Euroscepticism is liberal and globalist, and there will be plenty of advocates for unilateral free trade with the EU once we leave. But all of this will go out of the window if the EU starts to ground UK airlines or shut factories.

There would be a public outpouring of anti-European rage, forcing Mrs May to respond in kind, including by withholding military and security cooperation, penalising European firms and seeking to undermine the EU at every opportunity.

Such tit-for-tat madness would be a terrible outcome, an appalling failure. The ball is in Mrs Merkel's court: she must stop playing with fire, and put the apparatchiks in Brussels back into their box before they can do any more harm.

