**Reasons to be optimistic post-Brexit**

So, Britain has voted and decided to call it a day on the European project. Politically, it’s all change to the left, right and centre too, but political shenanigans aside (and there are plenty) the Brexit result will have implications for ground engineering as well as the wider construction sector, which ultimately feeds our work supply.

It was apparent from both sides of the argument during election campaigning that the future is uncertain and, unsurprisingly, the complexity of the UK’s ultimate exit and the relationship it negotiates is now the topic of much speculation and debate. With this backdrop and the lack of a crystal ball, just what can we do to manage the implications of Brexit for piling and the wider construction sector?

Well, we should take an optimistic view. Yes, there will be some challenges ahead for the construction sector, not least from the short-term volatility of the financial markets, but I really do think the sector is more resilient than many imagine. It has survived the worst recession of modern times and has had recognition of its importance to the UK economy.

To support this optimism, we need our domestic politicians and key public and private customers to focus on achieving stability. They can do this by making the right noises, in the right directions and to the right audience, ensuring the UK sends out an unambiguous message of confidence and business as usual. In practical terms, the FPS would like to see all parties confirming their commitment to the National Infrastructure Plan and commercial developers doing more to share their plans with the industry. Infrastructure, in particular, has been singled out for its importance to the growth of the UK economy and the referendum result does not change this. In fact, with the inevitable uncertainty that lies ahead of us infrastructure investment may be the one opportunity the UK has to ensure it doesn’t slip back into recession, however temporary this may be. Externally, the UK must aim for pragmatic agreements with Europe that avoid the imposition of trade and customs tariffs as far as possible, and maintain cross-border VAT arrangements to avoid raising the cost of doing business.

A contentious theme throughout the campaign was immigration, but I would hope the UK now maintains a sensible head on this topic and recognises the importance skilled European employees have to the UK construction sector. The industry relies on their contribution and this must be maintained to ensure the sector functions. Indeed, the contribution that UK construction specialists make to European infrastructure means that maintaining access for UK workers and companies to European markets is in everyone’s interest. A clear message needs to be sent out now about the UK’s position on the status of current European employees, as again this removes uncertainty both with the employees and with those companies that use them.

Regardless of the personal views held by us as individuals, and my own is widely known, we must now make the best of what we have. There were, and still are, aspects of Europe that need reform, but equally there is still much more for us to gain from maintaining a professional, mature and pragmatic relationship that works for Europe and the UK. We must therefore keep as much of what is good about Europe as we can and work enthusiastically to spread the message of sector confidence. Through all of this post-Brexit period, we need investment, we need growth and ultimately, we need an early return to stability.

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