

RACHEL JOHNSON talks ELECTIONS

Author and journalist **Rachel Johnson** was the latest guest to speak at the Women's Business Club, held on 6 June at Chanel's Salon Privé. The topic of the day? Politics and Brexit

The event, chaired by Estelle Brachlianoff, Senior Executive Vice President UK and Ireland at Veolia and President of the French Chamber of Great Britain, welcomed 20 participants, including the French Ambassador, HE Ms Sylvie Bermann, who also gave an update on Franco-British affairs.

Prior to having lunch, Justine Picardie, Editor in Chief, *Harper's Bazaar UK* and *Town & Country UK* gave a special talk about the fascinating life of Coco Chanel, of which she is a specialist: her book *Coco Chanel: The legend and the life* (2010), has been reissued this year.

Over lunch, and just two days prior to the UK general election, Rachel Johnson shared her views of the current political context and the British elections. 'This has been the most dismal election of our lifetimes,' she said. 'The way the election came about, the choice on offer, the prospects after the election... nothing is looking particularly good. Theresa May has not built up the goodwill of the people or the party.'

She also pointed out how no one in government actually wanted a hard

Brexit: 'We have a government run by people who wanted to remain inside the Single Market and who actually campaigned for Remain. They say that it is the will of the people, but this isn't the will of the people. Forty-eight percent of us voted against Brexit.'

Analysing the General Election campaign, Johnson added that May had made a similar mistake to Hilary Clinton – that is, to have tried to build a cult of personality. 'But this drew attention to May, and it has not gone down so well. She certainly doesn't have the "Macron factor".'

Influencing Brexit

Working on the assumption that the Conservative Party would gain either a very slim majority or – as it turned out to be the case – for there to be a hung parliament, Johnson explained this could present an opportunity to influence how Brexit will be put into action.

'The reality is that we are going to have a Brexit; we can't change that. But we can consider how to change Brexit – how we can turn it into a continental partnership where we retain access to

the Single Market, the customs union and freedom of movement. That's the new game in town.'

However, there is an issue in that it is not yet acceptable for politicians to openly push for this.

'It is seen as unpatriotic to question what is happening – we're not allowed to say any of this yet. It's quite Orwellian, where you have to say that it's all going to be wonderful because blue birds are going to be flying over the white cliffs of Dover.'

'But let me ask: how can the Cabinet stand up and say we will become a great trading nation again and replace the 47 per cent of our trade with the EU with Canada or New Zealand or India, when our manufacturing base is just 11 per cent of the economy and the City is going to be decimated by Brexit?'

Attendees were delighted to hear Johnson's open, honest views, with many echoing a lot of her opinions. Thank you to Chanel for hosting the lunch, Pierre Hermé Paris for their gifts and to Justine Picardie, Rachel Johnson and the Ambassador for speaking. ■ JH



Above : Author and journalist Rachel Johnson (*left*) and Editor Justine Picardie (*right*) speak to members of the Women's Business Club, including the French Ambassador, HE Ms Sylvie Bermann, at the event, held on 6 June at Chanel's Salon Privé in London

‘We have a government run by people who wanted to remain inside the Single Market and who actually campaigned for Remain. They say that it is the will of the people, but this isn't the will of the people. Forty-eight percent of us voted against Brexit’