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## *Still with Europe, but not of it?*

Taking stock of Britain's European debate

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## Editorial

### Issues beyond Dover

It has been a recurring theme in British history: how could a peaceful and constructive relationship best be sustained with the great powers on the European continent? Since the 1950s, this discussion has centered on, first, the European Economic Community and now the European Union.

Integration - "to combine things so that they form a whole" - implies a process committing the member states to a set of shared goals. The subsequent loss of national sovereignty has been a consistent argument in Britain against membership of the EU. Often, this has been formulated as a defence of Parliament, the quintessential political institution where sovereignty is expected to reside. Supporters of British membership, on the other hand, have maintained that no country is sovereign anymore in the traditional sense of the word. Heavily influenced by economic and technological forces beyond the control of the nation state, the best strategy for all European countries is to share sovereignty over common challenges so that each state can govern their own affairs more effectively, they argue.

The crisis in the Eurozone - and the multiple challenges facing the EU in recent years - has led to a tougher European debate in Britain. For the first time in forty years, leaving the EU is now a real possibility. Indeed, the Conservative government that was formed in May has a clear mandate to re-negotiate Britain's membership terms and then present these to the people in a referendum, due to be held in 2016 or 2017.

Will Britain still be a member of the EU in three years' time? To address that question fully, we first need to look beyond the political limelight. How did British politics get here in the first place? Which constitutional issues are raised by the possibility of a Brexit? What are the central arguments in the debate, and what will characterise the run-up to a referendum on this issue? Finally, how is the process now engendered by Britain seen from the perspective of its European partners?

Rarely is the saying that "what matters to Britain, matters to all" more prescient. How the European debate in Britain turns out certainly does matter beyond its shores, including - quite evidently - for Norway and the Nordic region. In broadening the canvas for the fierce and ongoing political debate, we hope that the present issue of *British Politics Review* may also shed light on its breadth and nuances.

Øivind Bratberg and Atle L. Wold (editors)

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# Britain, The EU and Brexit

By **Vernon Bogdanor**

Britain entered the European Communities, as the European Union then was, in 1973, after two failed attempts. Since then, she has been the bad boy of Europe. Why?

Britain, unlike Norway, has no written or codified constitution. That is because, in Britain, Parliament is sovereign. This means that, legally, Parliament can do what it likes. In the 18th century, a constitutional thinker declared that Parliament can do anything except turn a man into a woman or a woman into a man. But that is not a legal limitation. For, if Parliament were to provide in legislation that a man were a woman, then, for the purposes of legislation, a man would be a woman!

The concept of parliamentary sovereignty explains why Britain does not have a constitution. There is no point in having a constitution if it can be overridden at any time by Parliament. Indeed, the British constitution can be summed up in just 8 words – whatever the Queen in Parliament enacts is law. Someone once said that the British constitution is not worth the paper it is not written on!

The concept of parliamentary sovereignty also explains why Europe has created so many problems for British governments. For parliamentary sovereignty, unlike national sovereignty, cannot be shared. One either has it or one does not. One cannot be a qualified sovereign, any more than one can be a qualified virgin.

But the European Union demands the sacrifice of parliamentary sovereignty. It differs from other international organisations such as NATO or the UN in being a superior, transnational, legal order. Those organisations require



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the sharing of national sovereignty but not the sharing of parliamentary sovereignty. Joining the EU, however, involves transferring the powers of domestic parliaments to European bodies. Either these bodies are unelected – as with the Commission – in which case there is a democratic deficit; or, if the unelected bodies are made accountable to bodies which are elected such as the European Parliament, then the British Parliament becomes a subordinate parliament. The concept of the sovereignty of Parliament, however, provides that there can be no body superior to Westminster.

The concept of the sovereignty of Parliament stems from Britain's long evolutionary history. The form of the state has not altered since the restoration of the monarchy in the 17th century. By contrast, Germany and Italy did not even exist two hundred years ago, while most of the ex-Communist states did not exist until 1918, after the First World War. The peaceful and evolutionary history of Britain forms a sharp contrast with the more turbulent history of most of the states on the Continent.

Moreover, until 1945, the history of Britain could not be considered in isolation. She was at the head of an empire which, at its zenith, comprised one-fifth of the earth's surface. Britain's imperial history has militated against her engagement with the Continent. Indeed, the mind-set of disengagement from the

Continent was formed during the era of empire, an era which pulled Britain away from Europe. Pro-Europeans, however, argue that the era of empire, even though it has so strongly coloured Britain's sense of national identity, was an aberrant period in her long history, during most of which the fate of Britain and that of the Continent have been intertwined. Britain, after all, fought the Napoleonic wars and two world wars as a result of conflicts in Europe, not the empire. Nevertheless, Britain's path of political development has been radically different from that of the Continent, and the differences were reinforced by the events of 1940 when Britain stood alone against a Nazi-occupied Continent.



Because of her history, she needed to make greater adjustments to make a success of her membership than any other European country; and her long evolutionary history makes her more sensitive to incursions upon her sovereignty than many of the other member states. But other member states are also now beginning to worry. While happy to accept sacrifices of sovereignty at the rhetorical level, they are beginning to balk when they appreciate what it means in concrete terms - austerity, supranational control of their budgets and debt sharing. Britain may not be alone in having doubts as to the direction of the European Union.

Indeed, since the financial crisis of 2008, Europe may well have been moving in a 'British' direction, towards a Europe des etats rather than a federal Europe. For the crisis was confronted primarily by the intergovernmental institutions of the EU, and in particular by the European Council, rather than the more supranational institutions, the Commission and the European Parliament. In her Bruges speech in November 2010, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, confirmed this new direction when she lauded what she called the Union method rather than the Community method - the Monnet method - as the proper way forward for Europe.

But Britain remains nevertheless the only member state where exit from the EU is firmly on the political agenda, with a referendum on Brexit due to be held before the end of 2017. In his Bloomberg speech of January 2013 in which Prime Minister, David Cameron, proposed the referendum, he called for a 'new general settlement' in the EU which he could 'enthusiastically recommend' to the British people. Such a settlement would in any case be needed, he believed, as a result of developments in the Eurozone. Cameron did not, contrary to many commentators, call for specific opt-outs for Britain, nor did he mention immigration. The speech was in fact one of the most pro-European speeches made by any British Prime Minister for many years!

But in a later speech in November 2014, Cameron did emphasise immigration. That is the issue which has made the EU so emotive in recent years. Until recently, the EU, while not particularly popular, was hardly a salient issue in general elections. But its salience increased enormously with the onset of a massive wave of immigration from the new member states in the ex Communist bloc admitted in 2004.

Cameron's critics argue that he is raising expectations on immigration which almost certainly cannot be fulfilled, since, even if he were to achieve the changes he seeks - and that itself is very uncertain - only a small proportion of EU immigration is motivated by a search for benefits. Cameron, therefore, is unlikely to achieve the drastic reduction in EU immigration which he seeks.

The forthcoming referendum will not be the first that Britain has held on Europe. In 1975, two years after Britain joined the European Communities, there was a referendum on whether she should remain. Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who had attacked 'Tory terms' of entry, renegotiated cosmetic changes in these terms of membership, but claimed a triumph. The 1975 referendum yielded a two to one majority for Britain to stay in Europe. But that did not indicate positive British enthusiasm. The British economy was then in dire straits, with inflation at 27%, the highest it has ever been, and rising unemployment. Europe, by contrast, seemed to be prospering. One of Britain's EC Commissioners said that this was no time for Britain to leave a Christmas Club, let alone the Common Market! The leaders of the three main political parties advised staying in, and at a time when political leaders were held in greater respect than they are now, that advice carried considerable weight. Moreover, memories of the war were still strong and many believed that European unity was a guarantee against future wars. None of these factors are likely to be operative today.

Since 1975, British governments have sought to straddle two horses so as to reconcile the demands of EU membership with domestic euroscepticism. They have negotiated special terms for Britain on such matters as the EU budget, and also an opt-out from the euro. But it may not be possible to straddle the two horses for much longer.

## II

Were there to be a Brexit, the consequences would depend upon Britain's future relationship with the European Union. For Brexit is not, as it might seem, just one option but a catch-all term for a number of alternative options.

Britain could seek to join the European Economic Association - EEA - to which Norway belongs - or EFTA - to which she belonged before she joined the European Communities in 1973 - to which Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland belong - or she could remain outside both of these organisations.

The EEA extends the EU single market, together with the free movement of goods, services, people and capital into non-member states. But member states of the EEA are bound by EU legislation on employment, environmental policy, social policy and competition. That would disappoint euro-sceptics in Britain who hope that a Brexit would enable her to be free of what they regard as over-regulation. EEA members contribute to the costs of EU programmes in which they participate but at a lower level than Britain. Were Britain to contribute as a member of the EEA on the same basis as Norway, her contribution to the EU budget would be reduced by around 17% per capita.

But, if Britain became a member of the EEA, she would have to accept the principle of free movement of peoples in Treaty of Rome to secure access to the internal market; and in 2013, Norway received more than twice as many EU migrants per head than UK. So Britain would still not be able to control EU immigration.

Britain would remain bound by much, though not all, EU law, but would have lost the power to influence it. It is, admittedly, customary for EEA members to be consulted on pending EU legislation, but difficult to find many instances when EEA concerns have been taken into account. Indeed, Norway is sometimes known as a fax democracy since EU draft legislation is faxed to her for comments, without much notice being taken of the faxed response. A Norwegian politician once said 'If you want to run the EU, stay in the EU. If you want to be run by the EU, feel free to join us in the EEA'.

It is, in any case, by no means certain that Britain would be able to secure membership of the EEA, which was intended, not as a permanent arrangement, but as a staging post for countries, such as Norway, contemplating joining the EU, rather than for countries leaving it.

An alternative would be membership of EFTA which provides for free trade in industrial goods but not in agriculture. Members of EFTA pay to be admitted to the EU's single market, but play no role in its decisions. The loss of influence which this entails has to be balanced against the savings from ending Britain's budgetary contribution to the EU. Were Britain to contribute on the same basis as Switzerland, a member of EFTA, her budgetary contribution would be reduced by around 60% per capita.

Switzerland has signed a number of bilateral treaties with the EU to secure access to the internal market and consequent trade benefits. These treaties need constant renegotiation to take account of the development of EU legislation, a cumbersome and unwieldy process. Switzerland has signed an Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons which means that it must introduce equivalent employment legislation to that in the EU. This Agreement also provides for the coordination of social security systems based on the principle of equal treatment. In 2014, in a referendum, the Swiss voted to limit free movement. In response, the EU threatened sanctions in the form of withdrawing funds for Swiss educational and research programmes. It is probable that Switzerland will restore the commitment to free movement.

Switzerland has sought to secure the benefits of integration without joining the EU. She is bound by many, if not most, EU regulations, but is unable to meaningfully shape these regulations.

The consequences of a Brexit in which Britain remained outside both EFTA and the EEA, without preferential access to EU markets, but relying on World Trade Organisation rules, are difficult to estimate. The principle of non-discrimination means that the EU could not impose punitive tariffs. Nevertheless, there is a common external tariff. Even Norway, with its EEA agreement, has a tariff against some of its fish exports. There would also be non-tariff barriers which would add significantly to British export costs. Whether or not there were a trade agreement with the EU, Britain might well not gain the advantages she seeks, since the EU would not wish to encourage other member states to exit. Moreover, the EU would be unlikely to give more favourable terms to a country which decided that it did not want to remain a member than to member states. A country would not be able to receive the benefits of the Union without also incurring its obligations.

Any attempt to estimate the true value of the trade-off between, on the one hand freedom from the budgetary contribution, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, together perhaps with freedom from EU product regulations and social and employment legislation, against, on the other hand, loss of access to the internal market and inability to contribute to decisions which are bound to affect Britain, must inevitably be speculative. It is hardly possible to evaluate the consequences of Brexit with precise figures.

It is not possible therefore to provide a definitive analysis of the costs and benefits of a Brexit, since it involves weighing up intangibles, and estimating the trade-off between them. And, in the referendum, the decision may well be made on broader grounds than those of economics –

and, in particular, on whether the British people do or do not feel themselves to be European.

Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister and father of the European Coal and Steel Community, precursor of the EU, declared in 1950 that European countries shared a 'common destiny'. The question is whether or not the British people share in this common destiny, or whether they prefer to restore the sovereignty of Westminster, even if this may leave them, in the short run at least, worse off economically. That question can only be answered in a referendum.

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# Britain and the European Union: four futures

By Christopher Lord

As the UK approaches an 'in-out' referendum on its membership of the EU, it is useful to distinguish four possible futures for the relationship between Britain and the Union. Let us call these a) completely in, b) in but not completely in, c) out but not completely out, and d) completely out. A) and b) obviously presuppose a 'yes' vote, whilst c) and d) are possible outcomes of a 'no' vote. Both b) and c), as we will see, have claims to historical continuity with previous British relationships with European integration. All of them presuppose that there is a United Kingdom in its present form. But, then, the possibility that a UK 'no' to the EU might provoke a Scots 'no' to the UK is another story. The following paragraphs discuss the four possibilities.



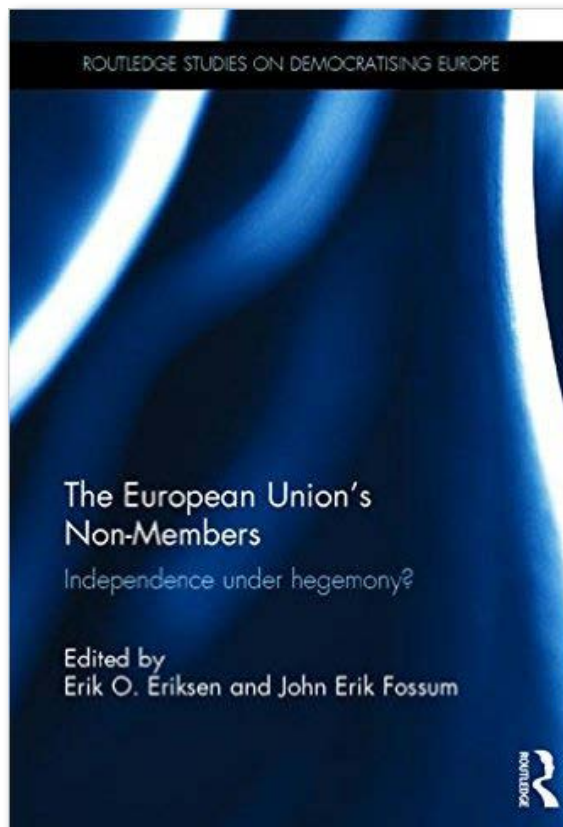
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**1): Completely in.** Under this option the UK would not just remain in the EU. It would eventually participate in all its policies, including the euro, or at least compensate absence from some commitments with 'above average' contributions to other areas of European integration. Many would now dismiss this 'future' as improbable. Yet between the Treaty on European Union (1992) and the financial crisis many – not least British Governments themselves – assumed it to be the most plausible long-term trajectory of Britain's membership. Even as he negotiated Britain's opt-out from a treaty obligation to participate in monetary union, John Major cautioned against regarding the UK as a European integration laggard. He told François Mitterrand that, 'Britain didn't just want to join the train. It wanted to be in the driver's cabin'. Above all, Tony Blair always claimed that euro-membership was the goal of his government. Indeed, he told the 2002 Labour Conference that the euro was 'Britain's destiny'. Of course, that destiny was forever postponed by economic circumstances, international crises and divisions within the cabinet. Yet, for the time being, Blair was determined

that absence from the monetary union core should be balanced by Britain's presence in a second - foreign and security policy - core of the Union. Britain's leadership in shaping the European Security and Defence Policy was itself a quiet revolution in British security policy which had previously resisted multilateral security co-operation outside NATO. At the time of the 2004-7 enlargements, the Convention and then the negotiation of the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties, few would have regarded the UK as anything less than a full and leading member of the Union. Absence from monetary union did not seem to be a constraint on how far the UK government could shape the membership, competence or decision rules of the Union.

**2): In but not completely in.** In just 45 days in 1972 the UK first joined and then left the common currency float (the snake) between the members of the European Community. It would be hard to under-estimate the importance of this largely forgotten episode. For a year earlier Edward Heath had gone to Paris hoping to interest President Pompidou in Anglo-French co-operation in maintaining their nuclear deterrents, only to find that it was on Britain's ability to participate in monetary integration on which Pompidou sought and received reassurance before lifting France's veto on UK accession to the EC. Given that commitment,

and given that the UK would only participate briefly and disastrously (1990-2) in further currency and monetary integration, Britain's departure from the snake before it had even completed its accession (1 January 1973) means that the UK has in a sense been 'in but not completely in' from day one of its membership. Yet Britain's opt-outs have famously grown and become more formal with time; and, assuming it remains a member at all, its partial membership is only likely to become more explicit. In part this is because the British problem is only partly a British problem. For other member states may find it as hard to avoid closer integration of the Eurozone as British governments find it hard to avoid seeing closer integration of the Eurozone as making their abstention from it permanent.



Christopher Lord recently contributed a book chapter to *The European Union's Non-Members*, edited by Erik Oddvar Eriksen and John-Erik Fossum and published by Routledge (2015), which the present article draws upon.

Thus an all-party report of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs committee recently anticipated that Britain would only be likely to remain in the Union as part of an outer tier based on the Single Market and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as opposed to an inner tier based on the closer integration of fiscal and monetary policies within the Eurozone. Even if a two-tier structure is not created through a single act of institutional design, the proportion of integration in which the UK does not participate could gradually increase through repeated use of differentiated integration within the Treaties or even of Treaties outside the Union Treaties.

**3): Out but not completely out.** Under this option, the UK would use Article 50 of the Treaty to leave the EU and then negotiate a continuing relationship with it. Thus the debate on Brexit has already given much attention to whether the UK could employ either a 'Norwegian' or a 'Swiss model' to continue to participate in selected Union policies. The former would use a mechanism like the European Economic Area (EEA) to ensure more or less 'real-time convergence' between British and Union laws in such matters as single market regulation. In areas covered by the agreement, UK commitments would be more or less automatically up-dated to take account of new Union legislation and ECJ rulings. In contrast, the Swiss model would involve the negotiation of 'static' bilateral treaties. Since it would not guarantee that British law would be fully convergent at any one time with single market regulation, the Swiss model would imply some risk of disintegration from the single market. Moreover, without the automaticity of the EEA, it is likely to be a complex solution. The Swiss, for example, have had to negotiate 105 bilateral treaties, none of which incidentally covers the financial sector, which, of course, would be important to how the UK would want to structure its relationship with the EU as a non-member state. Yet, if the history of Britain's relationship with the UK tells us that it never quite managed to be 'completely in even when it was in' from 1973 onwards, it also tells us that the UK never wanted to be 'completely out even when it was out' between 1950 and 1973. The exact decision in 1950 was not to give an absolute 'no' to the Schuman Plan but to seek association with it. Still, any continued relationship any Britain might negotiate upon exiting would differ in one crucial respect both its own previous experience as a non-member state and from the Swiss and EEA cases. Brexit would in and of itself create an entirely new category of ex-member state. Following such a divorce, the UK, other member states, and Union institutions would doubtless all be nervous

of creating a new relationship that merely reproduced the troubles of the old one.

**4): Completely out.** Until recently the Norwegian and Swiss examples offered comfort to many shades of British opinion that there was life after the EU, possibly even a better life of easy access to the single market without some of the supposed burdens of EU membership. More recently those options have been questioned. Cameron himself appeared to reject them in promising a referendum on Britain's membership:

*'There are those who suggest we could turn ourselves into Norway or Switzerland. But would that really be in our best interests? While Norway is part of the single market, it has no say at all in setting its rules. The Swiss have to negotiate access to the single market sector by sector. Accepting EU rules – over which they have little say – or else not getting full access to the single market.'*

"Britain's opt-outs have famously grown and become more formal with time; and, assuming it remains a member at all, its partial membership is only likely to become more explicit."

The more thought-out defences of Brexit have likewise turned against the Norwegian and Swiss options. Rather, they argue, the UK should be prepared to negotiate no more than a limited free trade area (fta) with the EU, whilst proliferating fta's of its own with North America, India and China. That just such a suggestion famously won the Institute of Directors' prize

for how Britain should exit the EU is perhaps evidence of the coherence of this position. Indeed, it may even be the only coherent position that Brexiters can take. For the Norwegian or Swiss models would absurdly involve the UK re-assuming many of the very commitments that motivate many Brexiters to seek exit in the first place. Both models entail *de jure* or *de facto* commitments to comply with Union decisions, to allow free movement of persons, or to adopt EU regulations. Worse, the UK, would, with the Norwegian or Swiss models, end up with many similar commitments but fewer decision rights.

Hence a sensible ranking for a Brexiter concerned with sovereignty might well be a modest fta, followed by full membership, followed by a Norwegian or Swiss-style relationship. Yet an fta that is modest enough to involve no commitment to Union institutions nor to principles of European integration nor to behind border regulation – save in so far as British governments remain fully in control of those commitments – is the kind of fta that most states in the international system, say Canada or Japan, can negotiate with the EU. Having a relationship that is no different from that most states can form with the EU is to my mind a pretty good definition of where 'out really is out'.

# To look or not to look to Norway? Brexit and the tales of Norwegian outsidership

By Kristin M. Haugevik

A peculiar side-effect of the ongoing debate around Britain's future in the EU is that it seems to have rebooted Britain and Norway's political awareness towards one another. In Norway, the possibility of a "Brexit", and its potential implications for the EU and Norway, has put British politics back on the agenda of politicians, journalists and scholars. In Britain, references to Norway regularly pop up in EU debates – as an example of a country that chose differently in 1972, and now has long-term experience with life as an EU outsider.



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There are essentially two prevailing tales of Norway's 'outsidership' in the current British political discourse. While both of them recognise that Norway has done well outside of the EU, they offer different explanations as to why this is so. They also conclude differently on whether Britain could (or indeed should) seek a "Norwegian arrangement" for its future relationship with the EU.

The first narrative about Norwegian outsidership is typically put forth by Eurosceptic MPs in the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and on the right wing of the Conservative Party. Here, Norway is portrayed as a success story – a supreme example of just how uncomplicated, good and independent life outside the EU institutional framework could be. One illustration is former UKIP leader Nigel Farage's observation in a *Daily Express* article in July this year, where he noted that "European countries outside the EU like Norway, Iceland and Switzerland are currently thriving because they are not encumbered by Euro bailout costs, and extortionate EU membership fees." On a similar token, Daniel Hannan, a Tory Member of the European Parliament, recently pointed out that "Norway, with five million inhabitants, manages to exert a largely benign pull on the affairs of mankind as an independent state. Could Britain not do the same?"

The second narrative about Norway's outsidership comes across as somewhat more nuanced, and is the one typically conveyed by British government officials, diplomats and members of the bureaucracy. Here, the basic message is that while Norway may have managed life outside the EU well, its experience as an outsider is of limited relevance to Britain. Already in his Bloomberg speech in January 2013, where he first outlined the plan to renegotiate the terms for British EU membership and hold a national referendum, Prime Minister David

Cameron explicitly stated that he did not consider the Norwegian model a viable alternative for Britain. "Norway sits on the biggest energy reserves in Europe, and has a sovereign wealth fund of over €500bn," he reminded the audience. "And while Norway is part of the single market – and pays for the principle – it has no say at all in setting its rules. It just has to implement its directives."

It is well worth noting that Norwegian government officials' own tale about Norway's outsidership basically echoes this latter account. Indeed, the message that Britain should not "look to Norway" as far as its EU arrangements are concerned has been the almost unison advice from Norwegian government officials in recent times. In 2013, the then Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide (Labour) warned Britain against following Norway's example, pointing out that Norway in many respects is as integrated in the EU as many member states, yet absent "when decisions are made." Similarly, in early 2014, the current Prime Minister Erna Solberg (Conservative) told Cameron that she would not recommend Norway's EU model to Britain. Highlighting the gap between Norway's high degree of adaptation to EU law and its lack of a seat at the table in Brussels, Solberg predicted that Britain, "with its old empire mind-set", would find it difficult to adopt similar premises.

Such statements may well be read as friendly advice to Britain, from a good neighbour and long-term ally. The British-Norwegian political alliance in Europe has deep roots and, until the early 1970s, Norway aligned itself closely with British positions in its approach to the European integration process. Only in 1973 did the two countries' shared path as outsiders come to an end, when Britain became a full EEC member while Norway remained outside after a national referendum.

Although there now seems to be fairly broad agreement among Norwegian politicians, journalists and scholars that Norway has fared well outside the EU, and that the gloomiest prophesies about life as a non-member have not come true, it is generally also acknowledged that being "associated but not absorbed" (as Churchill put it) comes at a certain price. In 2012, a government appointed review committee assessing Norway's relationship with the EU concluded that Norway "is far more closely associated with the EU than most people realise". On top of the EEA agreement, which gives Norway access to the EU's internal market, Norway has bilateral agreements with the EU on a wide range of policy areas. Furthermore, Norway often aligns itself closely with the EU also on issues that are *not* covered by its formal agreements, such as EU positions and declarations on foreign policy.



In fact, and as Foreign Minister Børge Brende told BBC this June, the general picture is that Norway not only implements “all the EU directives”, but it is even among “the fastest ones in doing so.” Yet, it is absent from the formal decision making processes in the EU institutions. This state of affairs, which has earned Norway the reputation as an “adaptive non-member”, has at times frustrated not only Norwegian diplomats in Brussels, but also government officials from both the Norwegian Labour Party and Conservative Party.

Both parties are pro-EU but since 2001 they have only governed with coalition partners opposed to EU membership. These coalitions have had an internal agreement that the government will resign should one of the parties wish to put EU membership on the political agenda (a so-called “suicide paragraph”). This, together with the fact that more than 70 per cent of Norwegians now oppose EU membership, means that there are few incentives for the pro-EU parties to breathe new life into the EU debate.

For Norwegian governments, the practical response to this state has been to formulate an “active” policy towards Europe, ensuring a strong presence in Brussels and making use of “the opportunities and available options provided by the EEA Agreement to safeguard Norway’s interests.” And this is where we may find an additional rationale as to why Norway would prefer Britain not to follow its example and become an EU outsider.

As an adaptive non-member without a seat at the table in Brussels, Norway often has to rely on “back channels” to make its views known in Brussels. Indeed, an explicitly stated strategy for recent Norwegian governments has been to seek bilateral alliances with individual EU members. While the Nordic EU members Denmark, Finland and Sweden have been identified as natural partners to turn to, Britain too is commonly listed as a “like-minded” country. For example, Britain and Norway are both concerned with safeguarding NATO’s role as the primary security organisation in

Europe, and both wish to decelerate a federal development in Europe. Foreign Minister Brende has suggested that Norway values Britain’s role as “a ‘no nonsense’ voice in Brussels on cutting red tape and regulation.” A similar message was conveyed by Prime Minister Solberg in January 2014, when she argued that Norway will be “better served if there are countries in the EU [like Britain] who are concerned that [it] should not be a fast train... but instead want to ensure that the cooperation we already have today works better.”

A third point is that a Brexit could complicate Norway’s life as an outsider. Should Britain actually end up leaving the EU, it is likely to attract much attention from both the EU institutions and the remaining member states, perhaps to the detriment of smaller non-members like Norway. Thus, on issues where Britain and Norway do *not* have coinciding interests, a Brexit could make it more difficult for Norway to make itself heard in Brussels. Norway would no longer come across as Iceland and Liechtenstein’s bigger cousin, but a small runner alongside Britain. It also remains to be seen how Norway would react, should Britain manage to secure a deal with the EU that is perceived as better than Norway’s own arrangement.

On the other hand, it is also perfectly thinkable that a Brexit could strengthen Norway’s political room for manoeuvre *via-à-vis* the EU – by adding a powerful voice to the group of EU outsiders and blurring differences between full members and associated ones. Finally, a Brexit may very well also lead to a strengthening of the bilateral ties between Britain and Norway. While the political relationship between the two countries is routinely

described as friendly and functional, it has a tendency to escape media headlines and the political agenda of the two countries. Given that energy, trade and defence are at the centre of the relationship, and that the two countries often have coinciding views on international issues, there seems to be unfulfilled potential for cooperation. If the two countries were to be reunited as EU outsiders, this could mean a revitalization of a bilateral relationship with long traditions.



**Inside/outside.** Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron with his Norwegian counterpart Erna Solberg, London 15 January 2014.

Photo: Crown copyright.

# Britain's EU debate matters to all of Europe

By Petros Fassoulas

After over 40 years of EU membership, which has seen Britain lead in some of the EU's most proud achievements, the country is faced with one of the most important political decisions in its post-war history. Should Britain remain a member of the European Union or go alone?



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This is the culmination of decades of an ill-conceived, ill-informed and often ill-tempered debate on the EU. A country that still has not managed to find a role for itself after its empire collapsed, has struggled to define its place in Europe. Instead of using the EU as a platform upon which it can rebuild its global status, its political elites have often used its membership of the EU as a fig leaf behind which many of the country's short-comings are hidden.

The EU has been used as a convenient scapegoat, with successes nationalised and failures Europeanised. It has been portrayed by British governments (on the right and left, to varying degrees) as something alien, that is done to Britain. As something that is all-consuming and irrelevant, powerful and sclerotically bureaucratic, lurking in the background ready to consume Britain's national sovereignty and stifle its economic performance.

The popular and yellow press have seized upon this, embarking in a systematic construction of a fantasy EU world that would make Ancient Greek mythology and Nordic Sagas pale by comparison. The front pages of newspapers read by millions are often the canvas upon which an image of the EU is painted so far removed from reality that it resides in the realm of the ridiculous. The recipe has been practiced to perfection and has proven extremely popular with the public, keen for something to blame.

Take a tiny dose of fact, smother it with a huge helping of fiction, top it with hyperbole and inflammatory nationalistic rhetoric and serve it to a readership so deprived of sensible, rational and fact-based debate that it is ready to consume anything.

All of the above have created a difficult context within

which this referendum will be held. Even though opinion polls have consistently shown an increasing preference in favour of EU membership, the outcome is by no means guaranteed. A great many remain undecided and the campaign has not started yet. A lot that will influence how people will vote can happen between now and the referendum, not least the outcome of Mr Cameron's renegotiation with Britain's European partners.

But why should anyone care? After all Britain is a sovereign nation - despite what the Daily Mail might have you think - free to make its own decisions and suffer (or enjoy) the consequences. It should be left to the Brits and the rest of us should go about minding our own business.

But it is not as simple as that, this is a question that affects the UK's neighbours as much as it affects the UK itself.

A rupture would have severe consequences for the UK, both in economic and political terms, but also impair its global ambitions. The EU remains, by far, its biggest trading partner and despite the promise of the new economies, the recent slowdown of growth in China and elsewhere shows that the mature economies of Europe remain a much safer bet than the uncertain and volatile markets far beyond.

At the same time, without its EU membership the UK will be deprived of the springboard necessary for a medium-sized economic power that wishes to project its influence globally, in a world of continent-sized players.

But the effects will be felt across the Channel too. Despite everything, Britain has made a considerable contribution to the EU's development. It led the efforts for the establishment of the Single Market and advocated the EU's Eastern and Central European enlargement. Britain has also been a champion of global trade deals, using its influence and network to

advance the EU's global footprint. Britain has been a stern advocate of open markets and competition and has of course provided the continent with its own global financial services centre. Last but not least, Britain is the third biggest economy in the EU and one of the biggest in the world, with a considerable military capability and diplomatic soft power.

"Despite everything, Britain has made a considerable contribution to the EU's development. It led the efforts for the establishment of the Single Market and advocated the EU's Eastern and Central European enlargement. Britain has also been a champion of global trade deals, using its influence and network to advance the EU's global footprint."



Losing Britain would dent the EU's ambitions and send the wrong message to the rest of the world. No alliance of nations, even one with supranational structures, can be considered successful if it loses one of its bigger member states.

Especially at a moment when the EU is going through its most challenging period ever. The banking, economic and sovereign debt crisis have put a strain on the EU, necessitating the re-engineering of its institutional structures and decision-making vehicles.

Furthermore, the global challenges faced by all European nations are both significant and common. Security threats from geopolitical instability in Ukraine, Russia, the Middle East, North Africa and beyond, competition for resources, international crime, climate change, the rising power of the new economies, declining demographics in Europe, migration. They all weigh heavily on people's minds and desperately require global solutions. They are all bigger than one state alone and a stark reminder of the need to club together.

But challenges exist within Europe too, dismembering the Union at a time when the forces of nationalism and populism exploiting people's fears will only serve those that see a united and strong Europe as an impediment to their divisive agenda. Far right movements across Europe have used anti-EU rhetoric as a way to disguise their intolerant, xenophobic, often fascist, inclinations. Destroying the EU is seen by many of them as the best way to unleash the forces of nationalism, which tore our continent apart in the past and have in the last few years crept into the political mainstream.

This is a time for rebuilding, not deconstructing. A time for pooling our resources and sovereignty rather than chasing nationalistic and isolationist dreams of a glorious past that never existed. Maintaining the integrity of the EU is of paramount importance, now more than ever. A British exit of the EU will only have losers, across the whole of Europe.

## The UK referendum on European Communities membership, 1975

Britain has been here before, voting on its membership of the European Union.

As will be the case in 2016 or 2017, the referendum on 5 June 1975 concerned the continuation of an existing membership. Britain had entered the European Economic Community (EEC), in 1973 under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. Labour promised in its manifesto for the general election in October 1974 that it

would re-negotiate the membership terms, to be followed by a referendum on the membership.

The result in 1975 was a resounding YES, but with a relatively poor turnout of 65 per cent. Support for EEC membership was strongest in areas with high average income and Conservative Party support; it was lower in poor areas and Labour party heartlands. Interestingly, Scotland and Northern Ireland gave less support to EEC membership than the English voters.

It was the first referendum to be held throughout the UK ever, and it remained so until the referendum on the Alternative Vote in 2011.

	% Yes	% No
England	68,7	31,3
Scotland	58,4	41,6
Wales	64,8	37,2
Northern Ireland	52,1	47,9
<b>Overall</b>	<b>67,2</b>	<b>32,8</b>





# Brexit? Nein Danke! Germany's view on the United Kingdom's EU referendum

By Isabelle Hertner



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In recent years, the EU debate in the United Kingdom has focused on only one question: in or out? In fact, the possibility of 'Brexit' (Britain's exit from the European Union) has stifled any deeper discussion on the future of the European project and Britain's role in it. Pressurized by his Eurosceptic backbenchers, an overwhelmingly Euro-hostile press, as well as the rise of the UK Independence Party, the UK's Prime Minister, David Cameron, has promised to hold an 'in or out' referendum by the end of 2017. Yet, before the referendum will take place, Mr. Cameron wants to re-negotiate the terms of the UK's relationship with the EU. Only on the basis of his re-negotiation, British voters will be asked to decide whether they want the UK to stay in the EU or leave. What awaits the British government in its venture to re-negotiate?

The UK is the first EU member state to demand a re-negotiation of its membership terms, which means that there is no example to follow. Despite such uncertainties, one thing is for certain: any re-negotiation of Britain's relationship with the EU will have to be overseen by the EU institutions, and first and foremost, the Council of the European Union, and be approved by the other member 27 states. Since announcing his intention of holding an EU referendum, David Cameron has focused his attention on the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, whose support for Britain's EU reform wish list is seen to be indispensable. The German government, however, has behaved like a 'reluctant hegemon', to borrow *the Economist's* terminology: Whilst British politicians and the press expect Mrs. Merkel to take the lead in the re-negotiation process, the Chancellor's motto seems to be: Let's wait and see.

**Can beggars be choosers?** The starting conditions for the re-negotiation of Britain's EU membership were not very favourable. To begin with, Mr. Cameron alienated Mrs. Merkel and other centre-right leaders when in 2009, his conservative Members of the European Parliament left the centre-right EPP group in the European Parliament to form a new, more Eurosceptic, anti-federalist group, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). Angela Merkel was not amused. What is more, after the 2014 European elections, the ECR invited Germany's newly founded Eurosceptic party, the Alternative für

Deutschland (AfD), to join. The AfD was the fiercest critic of Angela Merkel's European policy and called for Germany to leave the Eurozone and give up the Euro. Again, Mrs. Merkel was not impressed with David Cameron's EU strategy. In the run-up to the 2014 European elections, Mr. Cameron also snubbed Jean-Claude Juncker, the EPP's candidate for the presidency of the European Commission, arguing that the former prime minister from Luxembourg was the 'wrong person' for the job. Mr Juncker nevertheless became the new president of the European Commission. As a result, Mr. Cameron does not have many close friends on the continent. Vanity and hurt feelings, however, will have to be put away, as European leaders want a solution that works for both the UK and the rest of the EU. But what kind of solution could this be?

**Avoiding the 'Braccident'?** Mrs. Merkel was invited to speak to both Houses of Parliament in February 2014, an honour given to only two other German statesmen(!) post 1945. In her high-profile speech, the Chancellor did not make any concrete proposals of re-negotiation to the UK government. Instead, she said: 'Some expect my speech to pave the way for a fundamental reform of the European architecture which will satisfy all kinds of alleged or actual British wishes... they are in for a disappointment.' Mrs. Merkel then stressed the importance of the principle of free movement inside the European single market, a topic that has become very controversial in the UK with regard to migrant workers. However, she also made it clear that she wanted the UK to stay in the EU and referred to common interests in issues such as better EU regulation and EU budget reform. At the time, the German Chancellor could hardly be expected to present concrete reform proposals, as she knew very little about Mr. Cameron's re-negotiation plans.

Whilst the British prime minister has still not set out the full details of his negotiating aims, he finally outlined his key priorities at an EU summit in June 2015. They included: restrictions to welfare entitlements imposed upon EU migrants coming to the UK, greater powers for national Parliaments, and an opt-out for Britain from the EU's principle of 'ever closer union'. Mr. Cameron has made it clear that he would like to see the EU treaties changed, but this would trigger a long and uncertain process of ratification in all member states. Hence, as treaty change is highly unlikely to happen before 2017, Mr. Cameron has instead argued for 'irreversible' and 'legally binding' guarantees that EU law will be changed at some point in the future.

Mrs. Merkel has shown more willingness to compromise than some other European leaders. In a press conference with David Cameron in June 2015, the German Chancellor declared that she would like to find a solution, and that 'where there's a will, there's a way'. Mrs. Merkel did not exclude a future EU treaty reform, saying that it might even be in Germany's interest to change the Treaty of Lisbon. Yet, like the UK's prime minister, Mrs. Merkel remained vague in her statements. She did, however, mention a few 'red lines' for the German government. Most notably, Mrs. Merkel stressed again that she did not want to limit the EU's principle of free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. At the same time, the Chancellor conceded that the EU isn't a 'social union'. This statement would have pleased David Cameron, who would like to introduce welfare restrictions for EU migrants coming to the UK. Angela Merkel has a few colleagues in her own government (mainly those from the Bavarian Christian Social Union, the sister party of Mrs. Merkel's Christian Democrats) who strongly agree with such demands.

Overall, Mrs. Merkel has a difficult balance to strike. On the one hand, she sees the UK as a partner. Indeed, in fiscal matters, Angela Merkel's and David Cameron's governments are not dissimilar, as both have supported 'austerity politics' based on reducing national debts and deficits. The German government has supported austerity measures in Greece, whilst the British government has implemented them at home since 2010. What is more, voices are getting louder in both the German and the British government that call for an end to the so-called 'welfare tourism' from poorer EU member states. Reforming the EU in that direction could therefore be in both governments' interests.

On the other hand, the German Chancellor is caught up in Germany's Europeanist post-war discourse that dictates the deepening and widening of the EU. Germany's partners

thus expect Mrs. Merkel to defend the 'European idea' and avoid the impression that the UK can cherry pick from a European menu and opt in and out of certain EU policies whenever it suits them.

**What next?** As the 2017 EU referendum approaches, Mr. Cameron needs to satisfy the demands of his increasingly Eurosceptic party. Many of his backbenchers are keen to leave the EU, so the prime minister needs to present a convincing re-negotiation result. He will have to continue travelling to European capitals to garner support for his reform plans. Especially amongst Central and Eastern European governments, plans to limit EU migrants' access to welfare policies are very unpopular.

Another major challenge for the UK's government is that the current British identity crisis is not very high up on the European agenda. Instead, the Greek debt crisis and the possibility of 'Grexit' have caused great cause for concern amongst Eurozone members in the past few years and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Another big problem calling for a European solution is the Mediterranean refugee crisis. So far, the EU has not been able to agree on permanent, sustainable solutions for these serious challenges. Due to a lack of direction, it is therefore

rather unlikely that the EU will soon agree on a fundamental treaty reform that will please Mr. Cameron's backbenchers.

In all likelihood, Mr. Cameron will only achieve some very modest reform aims, which he will sell as a success to his party and the voters. In the meantime, Germany and the EU have more pressing worries. Against this backdrop, British grievances appear to be a minor matter. Will the chance of a Brexit in 2017 increase by default as EU leaders cast their glance elsewhere? Presently, the cards are being put on the table; it remains to be seen how they are played.



**Negotiator.** Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, holds a key role in the British government's attempt to re-negotiate the UK's membership terms in the EU.  
Photo: Martin Rulsch. From the signing of the coalition agreement for the current government, 16 Dec 2014.



# 1975 – Renegotiation and referendum re-told

By John Todd

The United Kingdom is approaching a significant fork in the road regarding its relationship with the EU. This article is intended to provide a brief but important glance in the rear view mirror to the previous in/out referendum on European Economic Community membership that took place in 1975. To set the scene briefly, the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973 on the basis of a parliamentary vote. Accession to the EEC was negotiated and delivered under Ted Heath's Conservative government and was disputed by the Labour opposition under the leadership of Harold Wilson. The year after accession there were two general elections, the first producing a hung Parliament and the second a Labour majority. This meant Harold Wilson became Prime Minister for the second time, having previously held office from 1964 to 1970.

Wilson's job was to keep together a party divided by Europe whilst dealing with a range of deeply challenging economic issues: this may be ringing bells for observers of David Cameron's predicament over recent times. Having opposed accession to the EEC in 1973, the Prime Minister had to come up with a plausible approach to managing the tricky issue of Europe. This he did via a commitment to renegotiate the UK's terms of membership and a commitment to a referendum following this renegotiation (this too might sound familiar). The referendum asked the following question: *"Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?"*

Over this period the Conservative Party was relatively united in favour of EEC membership, whilst Labour was deeply divided. Those on the left of the Labour Party were most strongly against the EEC ('anti-Marketeters' in the parlance of the day), whilst the more centrist party members were 'pro-Marketeters'. As a result of Labour divisions, the debates on membership involved the highly unusual step of suspending collective responsibility in the Cabinet. Normally, those who fundamentally disagree with the Government must resign from ministerial office. However, Wilson decided that it was necessary to suspend this convention in order to prevent his party from



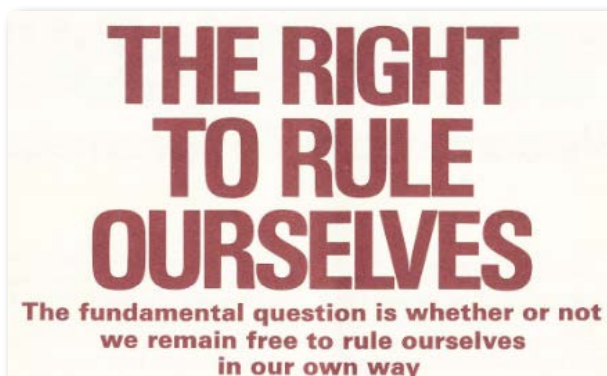
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imploding. Indeed, some argue that the whole process of renegotiation and referendum was more about internal party management than the high politics of EEC membership.

The referendum campaign was led for the 'Yes' campaign by Roy Jenkins, whilst the 'No' campaign's two highest profile members were the archetypal odd couple of the hard-left Tony Benn from Labour (who argued against on the basis of a national economic strategy) and the Conservative Enoch Powell (whose chief concern was that of a cultural nationalist). The leaders of both main parties eschewed a prominent role in the campaign: both Wilson and the newly appointed leader of the Conservatives, Margaret Thatcher, provided relatively low-key support to the 'Yes' campaign. The referendum took place on 5 June 1975, with 67.2% voting 'Yes' and 32.8% voting 'No'.

When seeking to understand the key issues at stake in the referendum campaign, the three pieces of literature sent to every household in the UK provide a useful overview. These documents were: a booklet from Britain in Europe (the 'Yes' campaign), a booklet from the National Referendum Committee (the somewhat uninspiring name for the 'No' campaign) and a booklet from the Government (which also recommended a 'yes' vote). It is worth noting that the two-to-one ratio of 'yes' to 'no' booklets matches almost perfectly with the referendum result. All three booklets—'Yes', 'No' and Government—contain sections on economic issues, food prices and Britain's democratic traditions. These themes are also prominent in contemporary Parliamentary debates and newspaper editorials. On the subject of newspapers, it is noteworthy that in 1975 none of the major papers took an overtly anti-Marketeter position – even the Daily Mail and Daily Express were broadly in favour of maintaining EEC membership.

When viewed from a distance of some forty years, it is the debate over the implications of EEC membership for British sovereignty and democracy that is most familiar. There was in 1975 a general (though not unanimous) acknowledgement that sovereignty had been lost (or transferred) as a consequence of EEC membership. The disagreements therefore tended to focus more on whether this was a positive development or not.



Sovereignty sustained. Section header from 'No' campaign booklet.



The 'No' campaign booklet argues that the Common Market shall "merge Britain with France, Germany, Italy and other countries into a single nation. This will take away from us the right to rule ourselves which we have enjoyed for centuries." This type of argument was also made during the Parliamentary debates, where a number of the key tenets of modern Euroscepticism were laid down, including fears of being subsumed into a European super-state, coercion and 'wheeling and dealing in secret' in Brussels and overall loss of sovereignty.

Another familiar Eurosceptic refrain can also be observed: that of British democratic traditions being under threat from a more authoritarian, less democratic Europe. For example, Enoch Powell made a speech during the key Parliamentary debate prior to the referendum in which he affirms that each nation has a distinct identity ('genius or character of its own' in his words) and that this identity defines the nature of that nation's institutions. Powell goes on to argue that this defining link between identity and institutions means that damaging such institutions cannot be done without 'danger and destruction to that nation itself'. He asserts that a sovereign and independent Parliament is the institution that 'corresponds uniquely' with British national identity – that is to the exclusion of any other institutions such as the EEC.

Whilst the anti-Marketeers made rather more of the EEC's impact on British sovereignty and democracy, the pro-Marketeers were far from silent on the matter. Many of them viewed EEC membership as having enhanced sovereignty, interpreting sovereignty as analogous to power and influence. Pro-Marketeers made a link here to the importance of EEC membership for the UK's economic prospects: the UK would be economically weaker outside the EEC and thus have less effective sovereignty. This is a theme that is certain to feature heavily in the forthcoming referendum debates on EU membership.

An editorial in *The Times* in the days leading up to the referendum astutely addressed the issue of sovereignty, noting that that the two sides were addressing different conceptualisations of it. The editorial judged that the pro-Marketeers "equate sovereignty with power", whilst the anti-Marketeers define it as "a juridical concept". Such questions of interpretation will doubtless be tussled over in the coming period as well: both with regards to sovereignty and power when it comes to specific issues

## Staying in protects our jobs

Jobs depend upon our industries investing more and being able to sell in the world. If we came out, our industry would be based on the smallest home market of any major exporting country in the world, instead of on the Community market of 250 million people.

It is very doubtful if we could then negotiate a free trade agreement with the Community. Even if we could it would have damaging limitations and we would have to accept many Community rules without having the say we now have in their making.

So we could lose free access not only to the Community market itself but to the 60 or more other countries with which the Community has trade agreements. **The immediate effect on trade, on industrial confidence, on investment prospects, and hence on jobs, could well be disastrous.**

5

Not to worry. Excerpt from 'Yes' Campaign booklet

such as the economic consequences of leaving.

In 1975 the debates over the EEC and its effect on economy, jobs and trade was very much a battle over interpretation: as one Scottish National Party MP quipped: "these are the conclusions on which I base my facts". The majority of arguments against leaving the EEC can be summarised as 'why risk it?'—given the fragile nature of the UK

economy at the time, this was an effective strategy. The anti-Marketeers also use the fragile economy to bolster their arguments, though they pin the blame on the EEC.

The fruits of Wilson's renegotiation with Europe also featured in the debates, particularly with reference to agriculture, fisheries and food prices. The apparent lack of tangible achievements in the renegotiation left Wilson and the "Yes" campaign with some tricky footwork: the Prime Minister acknowledged that Common Agricultural Policy reform had not been achieved under the renegotiation, whilst both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries did their best to avoid addressing the issue of fisheries during the Parliamentary debates. The effect of EEC membership on food prices was hotly debated, with both sides appealing to the knowledge of 'the housewife': a term that has been replaced in today's discourse by the glittering generality of 'the hard-working family'.

Overall, the pro-Marketeers' case for EEC membership was largely based on fears: fears of economic meltdown, fears of unstable food supplies and fears about the UK's place in the world. Indeed, the challenge for pro-Europeans to capture the public imagination with a positive case for EU membership is a phenomenon that persists today. The battle over truth between pro- and anti-Europeans will of course intensify as the fork in the road approaches. At this stage it appears likely that the pro-European case that a turn away from the EU would be a road to nowhere will triumph over the Eurosceptic vision of a short-cut to the sunlight uplands. However, David Cameron's position, like his predecessor Wilson, is tricky. He will have to make the best of whatever (likely meagre) results of his renegotiation with a set of European leaders struggling in the morass of the Eurozone crisis. Unlike Wilson, Cameron faces a media landscape where significant elements of the press are overtly Eurosceptic: this is a significant change from forty years ago and one that should not be underestimated.

# British media and the EU – the BBC in the dock

By Henry Allen

Media analysis, especially when focusing on particular issues such as the EU, is often hindered by generalisations. Statements such as 'the British media are euro-sceptic' or 'the British media are pro-EU', both of which are common accusations, fail to recognise the complexity of both the issues themselves and the debate around them. To assess the quality of media coverage we need to look at how particular media institutions cover and debate fundamentally important issues related to the EU. In this respect those who hold power to account, need, themselves, to be held to account too.



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It is hardly a controversial claim that the overall coverage of the EU in both the British press and on major broadcast channels is in need of significant improvement. This is evidenced in the coverage of specific events that directly concern the EU but also in the fact the BBC itself, the supposed stalwart of impartiality, has been consistently criticised by parliamentary reports (2005, 2013 and 2015) as not doing its job regarding its coverage of the EU specifically. What this article considers is, first, media reporting on EU issues, looking specifically at the Greek crisis and the migrant crisis and, secondly, the criticism raised towards the BBC's coverage of the EU.

As a catchall phrase 'the media' evidently masks the diversity of media outlets that people engage with. A homogenous media on which one could generalise regarding a particular issue would make life easy for analysis and comment. But it would not render justice to the significant diversity of both the media and wider opinion. With this in mind 'the media' here refers to the mainstream broadcast and print media in the UK. It should be noted that the importance of social media and alternative media sources are vital for people, but given the recent concerns around the BBC and overwhelming domination of the mainstream channels as sources of news for British citizens, it is these that I will concentrate on.

From some political corners the British media is seen to be 'pro-EU' and from others as 'eurosceptic'. This level of generalisation, and contradiction, is clearly not very helpful but also evidences a classic problem that besets outlets that purport to be impartial, like the BBC, when

dealing with issues that are so divisive. The divisiveness of the issue can in large part be put down to the tropes and narratives constructed and repeated by the media itself - and more commercial media outlets like to have relatively simple and black and white issues - in/out, for/against etc. The lack of ambiguity in both headlines and media content serves as a strategy in order to catch viewers and readers and ultimately sell newspapers and increase viewing figures. Complex stories with numerous dimensions and indeterminate and ambiguous positions are both difficult to write and difficult to consume. This is the principal problem why, I would argue, the coverage of the EU in the British media is in such an insufficient state, especially considering the important role of informing the citizenry in order that they can make sound choices based on good information.

If we take the current crisis in Greece, and the recent coverage of the negotiations between the Syriza government and EU leaders, one can see significant problems in reporting by both the mainstream news and the mainstream press. Bar a relatively small few examples the reporting tended to be overly concerned with Greece as the problem – not the Eurozone or the EU. This would hint at an overall 'pro-EU' media that failed to really address and criticise some of the core problems with how the Eurozone and its supporting institutions are structured. A notable exchange appeared between the Sky News host Adam Boulton and a representative of the Syriza government, seeing Boulton turning aggressively hostile towards the idea that the crisis could be anything but blamed on the Greeks. It was only on very few occasions that the alternative narrative voiced by Syriza was allowed to emerge. What it would contend is that Greek tax-payers are paying to ensure the continuation of a system that was originally undermined, not by themselves, but by a poorly functioning financial sector, corruption and rent seeking.

"Newspapers remain wedded to particular perspectives on the EU, the BBC continues to fall short of providing in depth and impartial coverage, and as a result the public continue to feel ill-informed."

It is interesting to note, however, that as the crisis developed so did some of the coverage with narratives around Germany as a bullying figure forcing the Greeks to accept certain terms beginning to emerge. Criticism of the EU institutions, however, remained slim and only really included cursory accusations regarding flaws of the Eurozone rather than how EU institutions had dealt with previous Greek governments. In this respect the general hesitance on the part of the British media to really attack and debate the deep political and economic issues at stake in the Greek debt crisis (which will no doubt continue) shows what could be termed a 'pro-EU' stance.

On the other hand, the more recent reporting of the 'migrant crisis' entails a significant proportion of the blame being put on the EU directly, by focusing on the rules regarding the movement of people within Europe and the lack of processing of external asylum seekers and refugees. The camps in Calais, known as 'the Jungle', from which migrants try to gain access to the UK (through both the Channel Tunnel and through boarding vehicles being shipped on ferries), have been in existence on and off from about 2001. It is only relatively recently though that they have become the focus of significant media attention as numbers in the camps have increased. The narrative that tends to inform the debate around the migrant crisis is that the UK already has a problem regarding immigration so the influx of more immigrants, especially illegal and undocumented ones, poses a significant problem to both the security and the well-being of people already living in Britain. As a corollary, the EU must shoulder the responsibility for problems of immigration, given the influx of both Eastern Europeans on the one hand and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle-East on the other (the latter perceived as entering by crossing European borders that are poorly policed). This forms a perfect storm for generally anti-EU coverage where the EU as a whole, and the European project as an extension, becomes the target of blame. The reasons for the migrant crisis are of course very complex and diverse which again shows a distinct lack of sophistication in much of the coverage in that narratives are formed that focus blame on particular parties – in this case quintessentially the EU.

The overall reporting of these two issues do show that the EU is dealt with in some diversity – after all, the Union is not presented as the culprit behind the Greek crisis. But often the sophistication of the coverage is found wanting. More nuance is perhaps what we have reason to expect from public service broadcasting. Which is why it is all the more serious that the BBC, the supposed stalwart of independence and impartiality, have recently been found to be in breach of their charter. The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee reported in March 2015 that they are *"deeply concerned about the manner in which the BBC deals with EU issues."* To further highlight the BBC's desire not to take these charges seriously they had systematically failed to report on the proceedings of any of the reviews into its coverage or any of the wider activities of the Committee. These criticisms come after three reports: (1) the BBC governors review into their coverage of the EU in 2005 known as the Wilson Report, (2) the follow up known as Prebble Review 2013, and (3) the Security Reform review 2013 have consistently described the BBC as significantly lacking in its reporting on issues around the EU. The 2005 report stated that *"[m]any newspapers and other media have committed positions on Europe. The public themselves feel ill-informed. Much*

*is at stake. As the public service broadcaster, the BBC bears a heavy responsibility for raising the level of public awareness and understanding of EU matters without itself taking sides in the debate."*

Whereas some major newspapers, and arguably broadcasters too can be said to be intentionally biased, or opinionated, the BBC is required by its charter to be impartial, and the Wilson Report (2005) crucially stated that *"while we found no evidence of deliberate bias in BBC coverage of EU matters, we have found that there is a widespread perception that it suffers from certain forms of cultural and unintentional bias."* It is not that the BBC necessarily goes out of its way to bias its reporting but rather that through the editorial process the coverage ends up being more 'europhile' than its stated impartiality should allow. In 2005 there were charges that the BBC failed to adequately address 'anti-EU' perspectives, giving less airtime to eurosceptics than they did to individuals that were pro-EU. These concerns that the 2005 report addressed were, in March 2015, revisited, and the 10 year gap has seemingly done little to help the coverage of the EU and related issues.

To sum up, while newspapers remain wedded to particular perspectives on the EU, the BBC continues to fall short of providing in depth and impartial coverage, and as a result the public continue to feel ill-informed. As the 2015 report states: *"Our central tenet, regarding the BBC's coverage of the EU scrutiny process in the House, and EU issues more generally, is that the country's public service broadcaster must command wide confidence in its coverage of such a sensitive and complex issue. We do not believe that this has been achieved."*

So the overall picture that the British media paint is a mixed one - in some dimensions it is overly 'pro-EU' and in others more 'eurosceptic'. This in and of itself actually provides some diversity in opinion across the board. However, the major problem lies with what the BBC is being accused of, and to which other media outlets are also guilty: the understanding of the complex issues at stake is poor. The three reports into the BBC's coverage of EU issues may also have further detrimental impacts on the BBC itself, whose charter is coming up for review in 2016. There have been further calls for the license fee to be 'sliced up' which campaigners say is the thin end of the wedge that will see the ultimate destruction of the BBC. This is the major concern - that the BBC's under-performance on a crucial issue such as the EU will ultimately undermine its position as a public service broadcaster. It is one of the ironies of this debate that the supposed jewel of British media institutions is under criticism because its reporting on foreign lands across the English Channel falls short.



# The passing of a true European: Charles Kennedy (1959-2015)

By John-Ivar S. Olsen

On 1 June this year, news came of a great loss to British politics, the Liberal Democrats and in particular to those who counted Mr. Kennedy amongst friends and family. The death of Mr. Kennedy concluded an era of great successes alongside personal tragedy. The life of this thoroughly gifted, intelligent and charismatic man had been so full of promise. From his early days as the youngest MP, representing the Western Isles at 23 for the SPD (Social Democratic Party, later to merge with the Liberal Party) he made his mark on British politics.



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His rise within the party was fast, and not only because he represented a party that was initially small. Had his political inclinations been of another nature, he could just as well have risen to offices of high power both within the Conservatives and Labour because of his popularity with voters, his ability to speak a language which appealed directly to the common man and not least because of his natural but modest intelligence. But the man from Inverness would always stay true to his political beliefs, never shying away from the background that came to form the man and his politics. A career politician seeking power for the sake of power he was not, a rare quality in our days and a trait which only speaks higher of him.

I was in the unfortunate situation to be on the other side of the world for this particular election, having in the past had to sit through a number of rather boring elections in which the outcome was given even before the official dissolution of the parliament. Due to the distance and pressure of work it was difficult to follow the election and events from day to day. Still, the news of an extraordinarily irate TV-performance did make headlines even in Asia. Although my thoughts naturally drifted to a possibly relapse to his alcoholism, they did little to lose my faith in Mr Kennedy. His fight against alcoholism was a lifelong struggle and a hard one as such, and he would not have been the first (nor the last) to suffer a relapse, only to bounce back later. Unfortunately, in his case, that was not to be the case. Some days later, he would be one of the many Liberal MPs to lose his seat in the general election

"A career politician seeking power for the sake of power he was not, a rare quality in our days and a trait which only speaks higher of him."

which proved to be a disaster for his party. Then, on 1 June came the news that he had passed away at the age of 55, due to a major haemorrhage linked to his alcoholism.

Such was his relationship to alcohol that it would force him to stand down as a leader of the party in 2006, paving the way for a short leadership period under Menzies Campbell. He would spend the rest of his political years as a backbencher, but one that was always listened to in the highest quarters of the party. As party leader from 1999, he had broken with Paddy Ashdown's flirtation with the Labour Party and Tony Blair. A few years later, as the increasingly unpopular invasion of Iraq came along, Mr. Kennedy would erect an all inclusive "big tent" for all those opposed to the war. The tent would be attractive to moderate middle-class voters, many of them professionals, who would normally waver between Labour and the Conservatives. At the same time, the tent would also come to contain a large number of disaffected Labour voters and members from the left-wing of the party, especially when combined with the prominence of social equality in Mr Kennedy's rhetoric.

While it must have seemed a good idea at the time, it would haunt the party years later when the party, now under the leadership of Nick Clegg, would turn to David Cameron and the Conservatives as a coalition partner where the Tories were substantially larger and came to dictate the direction and contents of policy. From his position on the back benches, Kennedy never aimed to hide his distaste for the coalition settlement and the political course that ensued.

This position brought him few friends within his own group of fellow Liberal MPs, but would ultimately prove to be the correct call as trading in political principles for power and influence would nearly wreck the party at the last general election. Mr Kennedy's dream was always a political system where the progressive parties, each representing their separate outlooks, would yet be able and willing to form

a united front against the Conservatives. This was a vision shared by many leading Labour politicians, but it would require a Labour Party willing to support an electoral system of proportional representation to replace "first-past-the-post". Effectively, it would bring an end to that lasting incongruity of British politics in which progressive parties would win the popular vote, but the Conservatives would invariably end up as winning majorities in the House of Commons time after time, and end up as the natural party of government.

However, winning elections has a tendency to bring about certain changes in how politicians perceive the world. Perhaps for reasons of “realpolitik”, Blair had precious little use for the third party in British politics in the aftermath of the 1997 elections (or indeed after the elections of 2001 and 2005). When the question of swapping “first-past-the-post” for a system of AV was put to the British people in the spring of 2011, it was only really the Liberal Democrats who fully supported the idea. The result was given and it was hardly even a fight. Only about 44% of the electorate even bothered to show up and the Yes camp was thrashed, with only 32.7% supporting a change of the election system.

When I met up with Mr Kennedy in Oslo a year later, I asked him if he could see the question of an alternative to First Past the Post anywhere on the horizon in the future, to which his answer was “not in my lifetime”. Ironically, the increasing fragmentation of the last General Election has again lifted the issue higher on the agenda, with a range of voters and parties arguing that in spite of considerable popular support, their voice has no chance of being heard in Westminster.

Readers of *British Politics Review* will undoubtedly remember his kindness towards us. Not only by contributing an article in the humble beginning of the journal's existence, to a special issue on the state of Liberal Britain. Even more so, he would even find the time to visit us in Norway. In January 2012, he delivered a lecture at the University of Oslo hosted by the BPS. Later that evening he featured in the NRK current affairs programme “Urix”. The dinner to follow was a true joy to behold, and we could only assume that he still would have lots to offer both the Liberal Democrats and British politics in the years to come.

Mr Kennedy has left us with a poignant reminder that the working culture of Westminster is in urgent need of reform. Too much time is spent alone, without family or friends and too much time is spent in the many bars which still are to be found in abundance within the



The Rt Hon Charles Kennedy, MP for the Liberal Democratic Party, addressing a British Politics Society seminar at the University of Oslo on 9 January 2012.

House after long and late working sessions. For most members, these bars are probably just a place to relax for a tiny bit, let off some steam and socialise. For others, they are a recipe for disaster. Those of us still proud of to call ourselves Liberal, one great comfort reminds. While Lloyd George may have been the last Liberal Prime Minister, Britain is still an overwhelming liberal country in terms of political

values. Mr. Kennedy was one of those who tirelessly made sure to ensure this and as such his legacy still lives on and shall continue to do so.

Perhaps most people will come to remember Mr Kennedy for his unflinching opposition to the war in Iraq, which helped the party gain 22.1% of the popular vote in 2005 and 62 seats in the Commons. It was the best result for the party since 1923 and a reminder of how much work the party is facing ten years later to bounce back to the position of the third party in British politics. But there are always new political battles to be fought. With the Conservatives running away with the last election, there is a big battle already brewing on the horizon: the upcoming vote on the European Union which will decide on a Brexit or continued British membership in the EU. There could hardly be a political cause to which the Liberal perspective – and the personal influence of Charles Kennedy – would be more relevant. He was a true European all through his political career and was, together with Tony Blair, Kenneth Clarke and Michael Heseltine one of the founding members of “Britain Europe”, the main pro-European pressure group in British politics up until 2005. As a gifted, pro-European politician popular with the ordinary voters, he will be hard to replace in a Westminster where popular and outspoken pro-Europeans are thin on the ground. As such, his passing will not only be missed but could have political consequences – not only in Britain, but in the rest of Europe as well.

*Charles Peter Kennedy, born 25 November 1959, deceased 1 June 2015. Leader of the Liberal Democrats from 1999 to 2006 and Member of Parliament from 1983 to 2015, most recently for Ross, Skye and Lochaber.*

# A clear blue victory which surprised the pollsters

## The political map of Britain 2015

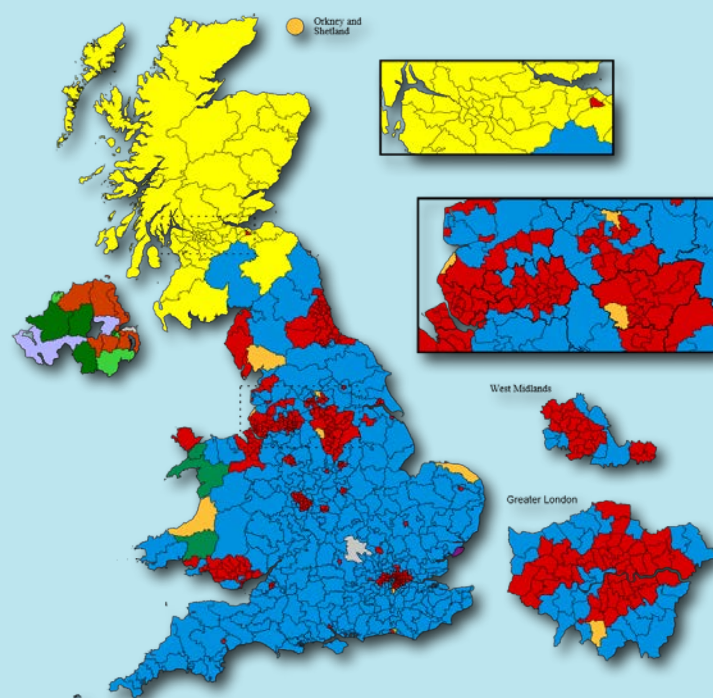
	Seats	Change	Votes	Vote share	Change
Conservative	330	+28	11,334,576	36,9%	+0,8
Labour	232	-24	9,344,328	30,4%	+1,5
Scottish National Party	56	-5	1,454,436	4,7%	+3,1
Liberal Democrats	8	-48	2,415,888	7,9%	-15,1
Democratic Unionist Party	8	0	184,260	0,6%	+0,0
Sinn Fein	4	-1	176,232	0,6%	+0,0
Plaid Cymru	3	0	181,694	0,6%	+0,0
SDLP	3	0	99,809	0,3%	-0,1
Ulster Unionist Party	2	+2	114,935	0,4%	N/A
UKIP	1	-1	3,881,129	12,6%	+9,5
Green	1	0	1,157,613	3,8%	+2,8
Independent	1	-4	98,711	0,3%	N/A
Alliance	0	-1	61,556	0,2%	+0,1
Others	1*	0			

\*Speaker

The general election of 2015 was held on 7 May across 650 constituencies. The turnout, at 66,1%, was the highest in 18 years (though below that of any general election between 1945 and 1997). The result, a Conservative majority in the House of Commons, was unpredicted by the polls, which pointed to a hung Parliament on the back of an even race between the Tories and Labour.

To Labour, the result was a great disappointment; it was however overshadowed by the catastrophic decline of the Liberal Democrats and the landslide win in Scotland by the Scottish National Party. South of the border, UKIP more than trebled its vote to become Britain's third largest party in votes; however, its poor reward in winning only one seat raised renewed criticism against the first-past-the-post electoral system. The Green Party voiced similar concerns, though from a third of the vote obtained by UKIP.

Overall, the return to single-party majority government gives the Conservative Party the opportunity to implement its electoral manifesto without the added constraints of a junior coalition partner, a result that was unexpected but which takes British politics back to one of the basic tenets of the so-called 'Westminster model'.



## Membership 2015

*Membership in BPS is open to all individuals and institutions with an interest in British politics, society, language, and culture. As a member, you receive subscription to four editions of British Politics Review, invitation to all events organised by the society and the right to vote at our annual general meeting.*

*Your membership comes into force as soon as the membership fee, 100 NOK for 2015, has been registered at our account <6094.05.67788> (please make sure to mark your payment with your full name). If you have questions about membership, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at [mail@britishpoliticssociety.no](mailto:mail@britishpoliticssociety.no)*

## Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

**The Labour Party** has been through a difficult process of reorientation and debate since its devastating loss at the general election in May. On 12 September, the election of a new party leader will finally have come to a conclusion. Whichever of the four candidates wins, he or she will have to hit

the ground running. Labour is facing sharply different challenges across Britain, with the Conservatives, UKIP, SNP and the Green Party all picking voters among former Labour supporters. Moreover, the new leader will embark upon a difficult spell in opposition.

Where is Labour heading from here? What kind of visions for the future does the party represent, and to what extent can it meet the challenges of 21st-century Britain?

*The autumn edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in November 2015.*