

# THE UNITED KINGDOM: REMAINING AT THE HEART OF EUROPE?

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## INTRODUCTION

In a speech he gave in 1992, British Prime Minister John Major stated that the United Kingdom belonged “at the heart of Europe”,<sup>1</sup> and he repeated this phrase when speaking at an event held by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

This political statement aside, the question remains as to where the United Kingdom stands today regarding the role it plays or is willing to play within Europe. The referendum planned by Cameron’s government even poses the fundamental question as to whether the UK is to remain part of the European Union or leave it. Are the EU and the UK becoming increasingly alienated from each other, or have they never truly been a good match? Would *Brexit* therefore be a logical consequence, or would it represent a catastrophe for the UK and/or the EU that is to be prevented under any circumstances?

Can the relationship between the UK and the EU be characterised as a permanently uncomfortable partnership? Or could the British stance on the EU not in fact provide an opportunity (and a certain amount of pressure) for the EU to question some positions and to aspire to some reforms that are ultimately essential for the continued existence of the Community?

- 1 | Major, John 1992: Leader’s speech, Brighton 1992 (speech), 9 Oct 1992, in: <http://britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=138> (accessed 27 Oct 2015).
- 2 | Major, John 2014: Britian and the EU: in or out? (speech), 13 Nov 2014, in: [http://kas.de/upload/dokumente/2014/11/141113\\_Rede\\_John\\_Major.pdf](http://kas.de/upload/dokumente/2014/11/141113_Rede_John_Major.pdf) (accessed 27 Oct 2015).

There are no simple answers to these questions, particularly as views in the UK are by no means unanimous, there are obvious conflicts of interests, and Eurosceptics and Europhiles can be found right across the political spectrum. The EU referendum will no doubt bring the debate to a head and lead to an intensification of arguments and emotions on both sides.

This *British Question* harbours significant explosive potential not only in the domestic political arena (e.g. the so-called Scottish Question) but also in the wider European context. Euroscepticism has not been a purely British phenomenon for some time; anti-EU movements and parties have gained considerably in popularity throughout Europe. This fact alone makes it fitting to give serious consideration to the British questions and demands, not only to retain the UK as a fundamental part of the EU, but also to shape the EU on the whole as a sustainable unit. This will require credibility and acceptance by the citizens of all member states, whose concerns and questions need to be taken seriously. Consequently, the Brexit debate does not only present a problem and risk to both sides but also an opportunity for the UK and for Europe.

## **THE BACKSTORY**

It is indicative of the current debate on the role of the UK within the EU ahead of the referendum that historians have begun speaking up on both sides.<sup>3</sup> On the side of the Eurosceptics are the Historians for Britain, who have issued a manifesto entitled "Britain: apart from or a part of Europe?", in which they put forward a number of (partly questionable) arguments maintaining that the UK has always been an independent part separate from continental Europe. The historians on the pro-European side responded immediately by stating the Historians for Britain had confirmed that the UK had belonged to Europe for centuries and that the interrelationship was so intensive that this could not be seriously denied. Although British History and European History are taught as separate units of study at British universities, and the term European is used to refer to the continent excluding the island, it is truly difficult to imagine how the interaction between the two can be ignored. After all, even the most British of institutions, the monarchy, is not exempt. By the time a Dutch duke was placed on the British throne in 1689 and a German Elector became King of Great Britain and Ireland in 1714 at the latest, the

3 | Cf. Chabal, Emile / Malonowski, Stephan 2015: Ganz aparte Briten?, in: Die Zeit, 16 Jul 2015.

influence of continental Europe on the UK had become reality at that level as well.

While it is therefore clear that the UK forms part of Europe, it must also be understood that this does not automatically resolve its difficult relationship with the European Union. Most British still associate the term Europe spontaneously with continental Europe, in other words with everything beginning beyond the Channel (there is therefore no comprehensive and automatic emotional affinity; even World War II was experienced differently in the UK despite the bombardment of its cities because it did not suffer a ground invasion), and the UK's accession to what was then the EEC in 1973 was "only" that: accession to an economic and trading bloc. The British people have to a large degree not acknowledged its development into a political union or at least only with increasing scepticism. One should not forget that the lack of affinity, at least during this foundation period, was mutual. As is well-known, the UK's first application to join the EEC in 1961 failed due to persistent objections by the French.<sup>4</sup> The UK was finally admitted on the second attempt (application submitted in 1967) in 1973 after lengthy negotiations.

**Accession by the UK to the EEC in 1973 was primarily driven by economic incentives. The EEC's evolution into a political union was never aspired to.**

This also explains current expectations regarding the impending referendum. The last referendum held in 1975 dates back as far as four decades (and therefore over a generation). Most people also think that the original referendum had been about joining an economic community, which no longer exists in the same form, making a renewed referendum not only sensible but necessary.

In view of this complicated and partly confusing situation and the distinction between Europe, Continental Europe and the European Union, which goes beyond semantics, there are no satisfactory answers yet to the questions as to what unites the UK with the

4 | Charles de Gaulle once pointed out that England was "insular, maritime and linked by her exchanges, her markets and her supply routes to the most diverse and often farthest-flung of nations". And the country "has in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions". The British and the other candidates joining would therefore irrevocably change the Community. The result would be a "colossal Atlantic community" under U.S. direction and leadership that would "quickly absorb" the European Community. Cf. Krupa, Matthias 2013: Ein Königreich für Europa, Die Zeit, 31 Jan 2013, in: <http://zeit.de/2013/06/Grossbritannien-EU-Beitritt-Geschichte/seite-2> (accessed 27 Oct 2015).

European Union in particular, what joint interests and requirements there are, as well as which limits and considerations are sensible and necessary in this relationship if it is to survive sustainably in the long term.

No doubt the Channel Tunnel has brought the *Continent* and the *Kingdom* closer together in terms of logistics; but the old witticism that fog over the Channel has cut off the continent still expresses quite eloquently the way the British see themselves.



The Union Jack and the flag of the EU: In the context of the most recent crisis, distance between the European Union and the United Kingdom has intensified even more. | Source: Dave Kellam, flickr ©📷.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Against this historical backdrop, the relationship between the EU and the UK is characterised by increasing tension or even alienation. Britain has not completed the journey from EEC to EU either emotionally (in terms of a deeper bond) or practically, as illustrated by numerous special arrangements and opt-outs. While the UK has actively encouraged and supported the Eastern expansion of the EU, it then increasingly resisted the practical consequences, for instance in the area of the free movement of labour. This distancing stance has not only manifested clearly in the context of the recent crises in the EU, but even intensified. The euro debt crisis has given the country grounds to feel justified in its decision not to join the euro and it consequently does not consider itself obligated to become involved in a bailout solution, such as in the

case of Greece. From a British perspective, this concept or a joint stability pact and other financial security instruments of the ECB are restricted to the eurozone in any event and are therefore not seen as relevant to the UK's own future in the EU.

At best, the British will admit to a certain (almost compassionate) understanding of the fact that the countries making up the eurozone will need to grow closer and become more integrated to enable the euro to function as a joint currency. But the eurozone crisis has strengthened the strongly ingrained conviction across all parties that joining the euro will not represent a desirable option for the country for the foreseeable future.

Under these circumstances, it is fundamental to the British that the EU is not equated with the eurozone and that no credence is given to the idea that EU membership will only be viable in the

medium and long term with a joint currency

**The United Kingdom aims at a Europe à la carte with different levels of integration and different currencies.**

for all members. The concept of a two-speed Europe is consequently not acceptable to the British as a vision of the future either, as different speeds will ultimately still lead to

the same goal. British ideas in fact aim at a Europe with different levels of integration and different currencies, which critics in turn frown upon as a Europe à la carte.

## **THE MIGRATION CRISIS**

In the context of the refugee crisis across Europe, the public debate in the UK hardly differentiates between migrants seeking work, economic migrants and asylum seekers, or only between "legal" and "illegal" immigrants, if at all. The official migration statistics are further inflated by the large number of foreign students in the UK (some 180,000 last year). The term migrants is used to describe all these groups, which makes the debate about the causes and ways of dealing with the phenomenon more difficult.

While this used to be a rather diffuse issue, coming to public attention mainly in the context of the regularly published immigration statistics, the images and the confrontations between police and migrants near the Eurotunnel near Calais in the summer of 2015 have brought it to the forefront. Back in spring, the British government refused categorically to participate in a Europe-wide quota system for accepting refugees (although the British were not alone in this). However, the government abandoned this

intransigent stance (obviously in response to the impression the images of the drowned boy in Bodrum had made on the British public) and announced that it intended to bring 20,000 Syrian refugees to the UK directly from the refugee camps over the next five years. In addition, the UK is to increase its direct aid budget from 115 million to 1.1 billion British pounds. However, the UK still refuses to participate in the EU plan to address the refugee crisis and to commit to the financial contribution this would entail.

The topic of migration has, in fact, been central to the domestic policy debate in the UK for some time and not just since the recent exacerbation of the refugee crisis. This issue was at the center of the 2014 European election campaign. The debate essentially boiled down to the question on the extent to which EU membership is ultimately responsible for the uncontrolled flow of migrants to the UK and the extent to which the country has reached its capacity limits (social security, housing, education system).



Refugees in Calais: Thousands of them hope to somehow get to Great Britain from there. | Source: © Regis Duvignau, Reuters.

The remarkable thing in this debate over the extent and control of migration is the causal link that is being drawn between the UK's EU membership and the free movement of workers. The equally significant immigration from non-EU countries and the special relationships with the Commonwealth countries hardly get a mention. The (justified) pride of being a country with a welcoming

tradition has given way to increasing concern about not being able to cope with the steadily increasing flow of migrants.

## THE SCOTTISH QUESTION

The independence referendum of 18 September 2014<sup>5</sup> has for the time being – narrowly – prevented the threatened breakup of the United Kingdom. The hope that the decision would stand for a generation, which the government voiced in this context, may well prove to be unfounded. During the course of the referendum campaign, the question was frequently posed as to what the impact on Scotland would be if the UK were to leave the EU. Even at that time, there was open speculation that another independence referendum would be sought in that case to enable a then independent Scotland to remain a member of the EU or to re-join. Whatever the potential complications under international

**Even though Scotland is generally considered less Eurosceptic, it would be wrong to conclude from this an unanimous Scottish approval of the EU.**

and EU law, this discussion also showed that there are significant differences with respect to relations with Europe within the UK. Scotland is generally considered less Eurosceptic, or even Europhile.<sup>6</sup> But to conclude from this that there is unanimous approval of the EU in Scotland would be erroneous. The Scottish government has also pushed for EU reforms, although its demands have been comparatively more restrained in both scope and tone.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is appropriate and important to bear in mind that the questions of the UK's EU membership and of its internal cohesion or the question of Scottish independence are closely linked and that this will no doubt play a correspondingly important role in the referendum campaign. This can and probably will go so far that the pro-EU campaign will argue that leaving the EU will inevitably result in Scotland leaving the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

5 | For a detailed analysis see Blomeier, Hans-Hartwig 2014: Britain Remains United. But What Now?, KAS International Reports 10/2014, in: [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_39341-544-2-30.pdf?141104140238](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_39341-544-2-30.pdf?141104140238) (accessed 27 Oct 2015).

6 | After all, the flags flying outside the Scottish Parliament include the European flag in addition to the Flag of Scotland (the Saltire) and the Union Jack; an unlikely picture in the rest of the UK.

7 | Cf. Scottish Government 2013: Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland, Nov 2013, p.216 ff., in: <http://gov.scot/resource/0043/00439021.pdf> (accessed 27 Oct 2015).

8 | Cf. Stephens, Philip 2015: Britain would not survive a vote for Brexit, Financial Times, 25 Jun 2015, in: <http://on.ft.com/1MDPFzB> (accessed 9 Nov 2015).

However, the converse argument, namely that the UK remaining in the EU would put an end to the Scottish quest for independence, does not apply. The landslide victory of the Scottish National Party (SNP) at the general election of 7 May, when it succeeded in winning in 56 of the 59 Scottish constituencies, has buoyed the party's commitment to the ambition of gaining independence for Scotland. The Scottish Parliament election in 2016 will show whether the trend will continue. National unity is currently an existential issue for the United Kingdom. And there are, of course, parallels elsewhere in Europe (Catalonia, etc.); one could even say there is a trend throughout Europe. The challenge is to reconcile regional identity, nation state and European integration.

### **THE REFERENDUM**

The last and so far only referendum on EU membership dates back 40 years. In 1975, 67.23 per cent voted in favour of joining the EEC.

In the current referendum debate, frequent reference is made to this first referendum and naturally also to the fact that much has changed in Europe during four decades, which not only justifies a new referendum, but in fact makes it necessary. The question as to what extent Prime Minister Cameron has put himself under pressure unnecessarily with his promise of a referendum made in 2013 is now moot as it will definitely take place. Only the precise timing is yet to be determined. The referendum will come, but it will not resolve the issue; it is worth taking another look at Scotland to see why.

In Scotland, the referendum campaign aroused passions with respect to the question of independence to an unprecedented degree. The main impact of the referendum, however, was that the SNP emerged greatly strengthened despite losing the vote. The EU referendum harbours a similar risk. Even if it produces a clear vote in favour of the UK remaining in the EU, as current surveys suggest,<sup>9</sup> the question remains as to who within the political landscape will back the "out" vote. One has to remember that UKIP was able to attract close to four million votes during the last general election and was limited to just one seat in the House of

9 | Results from a YouGov survey of June 2015 on how people would vote on the question "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?": 43 per cent responded "Yes", 36 per cent "No", 18 per cent "Don't know" and three per cent said they would not vote. Handelsblatt 2015: Britanniens Sonderweg in der EU, 26 Jun 2015.

Commons only because of the idiosyncrasies of the British voting system. The potential referendum votes in favour of leaving could give a renewed boost to UKIP as well as igniting a difficult internal debate in the Conservative Party.

By making the promise of holding such a referendum by the end of 2017, David Cameron and his Conservative Party effectively started the referendum campaign in 2015. The Conservatives were the only party explicitly promising such a referendum.<sup>10</sup> Since then, there have been increasing indications that the British government intends to hold the referendum as early as 2016<sup>11</sup> to avoid clashing with the French presidential elections in the first half of 2017 and the German Bundestag elections in the late summer of 2017.

**It is due to the recent challenges Europe currently faces that the Brexit debate has become the centre of political debate in the UK.**

In the domestic arena, the next few weeks and months promise to be an exciting time, partly or precisely because of the referendum. While Europe had not been a key topic in the previous election campaign, this has changed abruptly. The debate on asylum and migration throughout Europe, the Greek crisis and the intensifying Brexit debate have placed the EU back at the center of political debate in the UK; and these issues in particular have certainly not made things easier for the pro-EU camp.

Both sides officially began campaigning in the middle of October. There are two "out" campaigns rivalling to act as opinion leaders, namely Leave.EU (backed primarily by UKIP and Nigel Farage) and the Vote Leave campaign (backed by politicians from various parties and entrepreneurs with Nigel Lawson as the figurehead); they have since attracted considerable donations, boosting their capacity to engage in effective campaigning. Those on the side of the "in" campaign (Britain stronger in Europe) are headed by the former Marks & Spencer CEO, Lord Rose; further supporters include former Prime Ministers John Major, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

10 | The Conservative Party 2015: The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015, p. 72-73, in: <https://conservatives.com/manifesto> (accessed 9 Nov 2015).

11 | Currently, 5 May 2016 is excluded as a possible date, as local elections take place in the UK on that day. Possible dates include days in June or October 2016. The second reading of the Referendum Bill in the House of Lords having been scheduled for October 2015 means the required legislation could be in place and a date could be set for polling day by the end of the year.



Protest against Scotland's independence: The UK remaining in the EU is closely connected with Scotland remaining in the UK. | Source: © Cathal McNaughton, Reuters.

### **BRITISH IDEAS ON EU REFORM**

David Cameron has avoided spelling out the British ideas on EU reforms publicly in too much detail. And for good domestic policy reasons: UKIP, parts of his own party, the mostly Eurosceptic press and probably, for tactical reasons, also the opposition parties would "take apart" such a detailed catalogue of demands and reject it as both insufficient and unrealistic.

It is obvious that the British government has learned from mistakes made during its previous term in office. Instead of making unrealistic demands in public, there are indications that the government, first and foremost Prime Minister Cameron but also Foreign Secretary Hammond and Chancellor Osborne, has begun an intensive marathon of diplomatic negotiations, promoting the UK's reform ideas and sounding out potential solutions in all member states as well as in Brussels. Significantly, there are signs of a high level of willingness to consider the British suggestions particularly within the Commission (despite the UK's earlier fundamental opposition to the President of the Commission).<sup>12</sup>

12 | Cf. Posener, Alan 2015: Cameron hat schon gewonnen, *Die Welt*, 2 Jun 2015 und Barker, Alex / Spiegel, Peter 2015: Frans Timmermans, the man standing between Brussels and Brexit, *Financial Times*, 19 May 2015.

The British government seeks reforms in the economic, political and social spheres. The ideas on economic reform center on the consolidation of the single market, particularly through a further opening up in the area of services and the digital market, as well as the consideration of the concerns and needs of the non-euro states. In the area of politics, the symbolic demand that the principle of “ever closer union” be removed from the Treaties of Rome reflects the concern that the UK might be drawn inexorably into the closer integration required within the eurozone despite being a non-euro country. The ultimate aim here is to be granted an opt-out from this principle for the UK and potentially other countries outside the eurozone. Added to this is the demand for the repatriation of powers or for state sovereignty. While a comprehensive study commissioned by the British government<sup>13</sup> on the questions as to which powers are ultimately more appropriate to reside at a national level did not produce particularly significant requirements, this demand continues to hold high symbolic significance.

The social topics center on migration. The demands concentrate on curbing social benefits for migrants or on imposing a waiting period for eligibility in the hope of achieving an overall reduction in immigration numbers – a hope that will probably prove illusory in view of the situation in Calais and elsewhere in Europe.

The difficult balancing act the UK government is still striving to achieve consists of putting forward reforms that are sufficiently substantial to be acknowledged as relevant within the UK while not being overly ambitious or obviously appearing to represent pure British self-interest, which would preclude their implementation or a consensus being reached.

In any event, it has been remarkable to see the recent change in wording. The British chief negotiators are clearly intent on presenting the reforms as serving to strengthen Europe as a whole, and the fundamental demand for changes to the EU treaties as a *sine qua non* has given way to more nuanced proposals, which could conceivably also be achieved within the existing treaties. The migration debate is the best case in point. After it had quickly become clear that the free movement of persons is considered an essential component of the EU in all other EU member states

13 | Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2014: Final reports in review of EU Balance of Competences, 18 Dec 2014, in: <https://gov.uk/government/news/final-reports-in-review-of-eu-balance-of-competences-published> (accessed 9 Nov 2015).

and a principle to which Germany is highly committed and which is therefore not up for negotiation, the British side has concentrated on denouncing the abuse of the social benefit system by migrants, which immediately prompted a substantially greater willingness to negotiate. The exacerbation of the asylum and migration problems throughout Europe and the associated debate about border controls and the like have increased Cameron's scope for further negotiation further.

**The change in the British strategy with regard to the migration issue prompted greater willingness to negotiate among EU member states.**

Prime Minister Cameron, who performed a remarkable political shift towards the socio-political center in his much-noted party conference speech in early October during which he homed in on socio-political topics, also used the opportunity to once again clearly state his current position on the UK's European policy. In the negotiations about EU reforms, his main concern is "what is in Britain's best interest". He stressed further that it was not an emotive issue for him ("I have no romantic attachment to the European Union and its institutions"). But he also stressed his intention and willingness to fight for a stronger Europe from within the EU.

## **ANGLO-GERMAN RELATIONS**

Germany has played a special role in the discussions about the UK's EU membership for over three years now. This is due above all to the significantly heightened regard in which Germany is now held in the UK (in matters of the economy, politics and even football), a cool-headed analysis of the true balance of power in the EU (specifically a marked decrease in France's relevance from the UK's perspective) and consequently the significance of potential support for the British reform ideas on the part of Germany or, more precisely, the German government and particularly Chancellor Merkel. This regard manifested particularly during the Chancellor's visit in February 2014, when she was invited to speak in front of both chambers of the British Parliament and met with the British Prime Minister and Queen Elizabeth II within hours. Following diplomatic protocol, the Queen went on a return visit to Germany in June 2015. The subject matter at the center of this occasion was the reform of the European Union, confirmed by the presence of Prime Minister Cameron at the state banquet in Bellevue. However, the regard for Germany is coupled with expectations that occasionally clearly exceed reality. This became particularly clear in connection with Cameron's failed attempt to

prevent Jean Claude Juncker from being elected President of the European Commission. He had obviously hoped for support from Germany, which had never been a realistic possibility. Despite this gap between expectation and reality, Angela Merkel remains “probably the best friend of the British people”,<sup>14</sup> even though this friendship has been seriously tested on several occasions.<sup>15</sup>



Chancellor Merkel on a visit to Great Britain: With regard to EU reforms, the German Chancellor is regarded as “probably the best friend of the British people”. | Source: Arron Hoare, MoD, flickr ©🇩🇪🇬🇧.

But British EU membership is also to some degree in Germany’s self-interest and of strategic importance in some respects. The Financial Times quoted an unidentified German minister as saying that leaving the EU would be a disaster for the UK and a catastrophe for Germany.<sup>16</sup> This view was also confirmed by a FORSA survey commissioned by the British think tank Open Europe conducted in early October,<sup>17</sup> according to which there is a considerable amount of sympathy for the EU reforms put forward by the British government among the German population. Particularly where questions of the transfer of powers, veto rights for

14 | See Thibaut, Matthias 2015: Die ziemlich beste Freundin der Briten, Handelsblatt, 8 Jan 2015.

15 | Examples: the Conservative Party leaving the EPP-ED group 2009 and the AfD joining the ECR group in 2014.

16 | Parker, George / Barker, Alex 2015: Europe: The British question, Financial Times, 20 May 2015.

17 | Forsa 2015: Quo vadis EU? Meinungen der Bundesbürger zur EU-Reform und einem möglichen Brexit, 13 Oct 2015, in: [http://openeuropeberlin.de/Content/Documents/Event\\_BCCG\\_EU\\_131015.pdf](http://openeuropeberlin.de/Content/Documents/Event_BCCG_EU_131015.pdf) (accessed 9 Nov 2015).

parliaments and the restriction of access to benefits in member states are concerned, the opinions of the Germans and the British coincide to a large extent.

It is a fact that the UK, with its powerful economy and its military potential, is not only enormously important for the EU as a whole as a member state in foreign, economic and trading matters, but also demonstrates a significant affinity with German positions on many regulative issues. The frequently cited Northern or North-eastern counterbalance to EU positions skewed towards the outlook of the Mediterranean countries would be significantly weakened without the UK. This counterbalance benefits the EU and to a not insignificant extent also Germany, assuming the UK will bring these convictions and positions into the political EU debate for the good of all and not just to maintain specific interests.

This assessment applies also, and at closer inspection particularly, in the context of the Grexit debate. While UK public opinion sided with Greek interests, occasionally using very strong language and painting Germany as the villain,<sup>18</sup> the British government showed noticeable restraint, keen not to let the matter put a strain on relations with Germany. However, this restraint was subsequently abandoned in the course of the massive inflow of migrants and asylum seekers to Germany and the resulting statements by the German government on migration policy, giving way to expressions of general incredulity and open criticism.

## THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN EUROPE

The debate about the potential or threatening Brexit is reshaping the question about the future of the UK as a nation as well as the future of Europe as a community of states.

From a British perspective, the question ultimately goes beyond the debate on domestic and economic policy matters and relates to the country's role in the world. The difficult process of international self-discovery of the former world power of the British Empire is in full flow. The avowed aspiration to remain an independent nation as well as a serious and relevant player on the international stage, refusing to be "dictated to"

**Britain's aspiration to remain an independent nation as well as a relevant player in the international area increasingly faces practical boundaries.**

18 | Cf. KAS-Stimmungsbild 2015: Einigung in der Griechenland Krise – Weltweite Reaktionen, Jul 2015, p.24-27, in: [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_42136-544-1-30.pdf?150728164946](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_42136-544-1-30.pdf?150728164946) (accessed 9 Nov 2015).

by Brussels (which is the general perception in the country), is increasingly coming up against factual obstacles (budget cuts in defence and foreign policy, blunt calls from the USA, for instance, to engage at an international level as a member of the EU). But there is also much at stake for the EU. As a nuclear power and a member of the UN Security Council, even a less powerful UK plays an essential role in EU foreign and security policy. A "Brexit" would therefore also weaken the EU significantly and for the long term.

In the search for a "fair deal"<sup>19</sup> between the EU and the UK over the next few months, there is therefore much at stake for both sides. The situation requires all parties to adopt a conciliatory approach, seek pan-European solutions and raise the level of mutual acceptance. To phrase it differently: ultimately, it is about a more British EU and a more European UK.

In the UK, and particularly with a view to the outcome of the referendum, both hard facts and emotional perception will play an important role. With respect to the first, what will ultimately count is brute self-interest, as the Economist rightly put it,<sup>20</sup> i.e. whether EU membership will put more money into British citizens' pockets or send more migrants to British employment agencies. The organisation Business for Britain has already taken up the issue on the side of the "out" campaign. A study it conducted indicates that the UK leaving the EU would mean an extra 933 pounds per year for each British household. To appeal to people's emotions, the organisation has further put forward the argument that the UK is "culturally and psychologically" closer to its former colonies than to its European neighbours. The "in" campaign will have to respond in kind with hard facts and emotional counter-arguments; there has not been much sign of either so far.

Ultimately, the question that undecided voters will also have to bear in mind is what kind of country the UK is and wants to be, looking back at its illustrious past, but also taking account of reality and changing global circumstances. And this is precisely where the challenge lies for the "in" campaign. Its supporters must link a positive future for the UK with remaining in the EU and avoid concentrating on painting a bleak picture of a potential exit. The emotional debate will play a substantial part, or as Rafael Behr put

19 | Cf. Pöttering, Hans-Gert 2015: Ein fairer Deal mit Großbritannien, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1 Jul 2015.

20 | Cf. The Economist 2015: The psychology of a peninsula, 25 Jul 2015.

it in the Guardian: "The EU Vote won't be won on the Eurostar but in the pub."<sup>21</sup>

Those who view the UK as a part of Europe, or even – like John Major – as belonging at the heart of Europe, may take hope from the opinion expressed in the Economist that while the UK may be an island, it has the political and economic character of a European peninsula, idiosyncratic, but nonetheless clearly linked to the rest of Europe (and not just through the Eurotunnel). In fact, even Margaret Thatcher, hardly considered to be particularly Europhile, once quoted Harold Macmillan as saying: "We are European, geographically and culturally and we cannot, even if we would, disassociate ourselves from Europe."<sup>22</sup> For the good of Europe and for the good of the UK, one would do well to remember these words during the months of negotiation and campaigning until the referendum and beyond.

21 | Behr, Rafael 2015: The EU Vote won't be won on the Eurostar but in the pub, The Guardian, 26 Aug 2015.

22 | Speech held on 16 April 1974 at the beginning of the referendum campaign in front of the Conservative Group for Europe, in which she included this quote from former Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Cf. Thatcher, Margaret 1975: "Speech to Conservative Group for Europe (opening Conservative referendum campaign)", 16 Apr 1975, in: <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/102675> (accessed 9 Nov 2015).