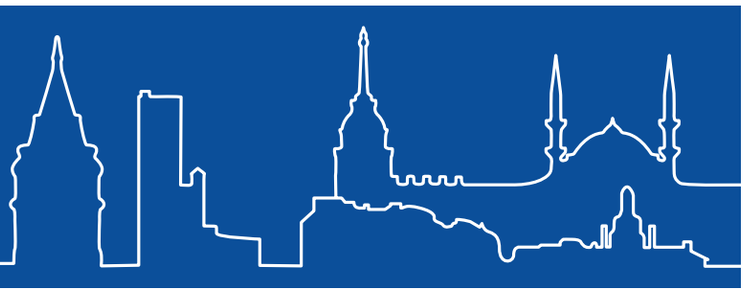
IPC–MERCATOR POLICY BRIEF



TO WHERE IS BRITAIN RUNNING? : THE REAL NEED FOR THE BREXIT REFERENDUM

Prof. Dr. Bahri Yilmaz
Morgan Palmer

Executive Summary

In the current state of political affairs in the United Kingdom, the in/out referendum is a fundamental necessity. The divisions within the main political parties regarding the UK-EU relationship have existed for quite some time and are inherently adverse to the interests of the UK. Prime Minister David Cameron has now achieved his long sought-after and hard-fought reforms. The question that remains, however, is whether the reform agreement will be enough to quell the rise of Euroscepticism. Although the aim of Euroscepticism is to bring control back to Britain in order to make the country stronger, it could very well lead to a separation of the nation states comprising the United Kingdom and ultimately leave the UK in a much weaker position. Thus, while the referendum is meant to be about UK-EU relations and the battle between Euroscepticism and those who are pro-Europe, it could very well end up as an assessment of the nature of the UK itself.

May 2016

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To Where Is Britain Running? : The Real Need for the Brexit Referendum?. 14p.; 30cm. - (Istanbul Policy Center-Sabancı University-Stiftung Mercator Initiative)

ISBN 978-605-9178-46-4

Cover Design: MYRA; Implementation: grafikaSU

1.Edition: 2016

Printed by: VERITAS BASIM MERKEZI PAZ.DAG.TIC.AS.

İstanbul Kimya San.Organize Sanayi Bölgesi

Melek Aras Bulvari Analitik Caddesi

No: 46 Tuzla/İSTANBUL

ISBN 978-605-9178-46-4

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Introduction

On January 23, 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech in London whereby he pledged that British membership in the EU would be renegotiated in conjunction with an in/out referendum if the Conservative Party won the 2015 general election. Cameron believed the public had become frustrated with UK-EU relations as a "result of both a longstanding failure to consult the British People about their country's place in the EU, and a changing EU that was undermining the current relationship between Britain and the Union."[1] It has now been over three years since Cameron's initial promise to renegotiate Britain's relationship with the EU, and much has changed. Since 2013, a long and hard battle has been waged over the innate skepticism within the Conservative party. Cameron has obtained a package of reforms from Brussels that he believes represents the UK's "special status," but now it is up to the public to decide whether the UK will remain a part of the Union or not.

A Divided Political Landscape in Britain

At first glance, this pledge to renegotiate Britain's membership in the EU and the referendum on whether to be a part of the Union seemed to be at odds with the concerns of the voters at the 2015 general election. When polled on the matters that concern them most, the voting population seldom mentioned Britain as part of the EU but rather cited domestic concerns such as the economy, healthcare, and immigration. Notwithstanding the recent rise of Euroscepticism in the UK, "only 6% of voters mentioned the European Union as the most important issue for them."[2] Thus, it appears that party campaigns based on this issue would not appeal to the voters and translate into votes and power. Yet, given that the Conservatives, surprisingly, won the election with a majority, there evidently is an underlying belief that Britain's position within the EU should be reassessed. A defining moment for Britain is now scheduled with the referendum to take place on June 23, 2016. Cameron's remarks hit upon a sentiment that has been entrenched in British politics for decades—that Britain is an island nation protective of its independence and sovereignty. Britain's relationship with the EU has been characterized by "an insular mentality, a history of strained relations, a pragmatic – rather than an ideological or visionary – approach and frustrations at the EU's apparent lack of ability to respond to global events."[3] The pressure from Eurosceptics within political groups and the parties themselves has caused countless problems for decades. The tensions between Britain and the EU eventually led to the undoing of Margret Thatcher, as well as having plagued John Major's premiership with "majority difficulties during the Maastricht Treaty vote."[4] John Major himself has said that EU policy has "come close to destroying the Conservative Party."[5] Former Conservative Party leader William Hague has asserted a very similar opinion, portraying "Europe as a 'ticking time-bomb.'"[6] Cameron has perhaps realized, however, that the EU is an essential part of UK politics. With the tide of tabloid headlines concerning the Eurozone financial crisis and the mass migration of refugees, the Brexit issue must be settled in order for the Prime Minister to be able to govern the country as a united party and lead Great Britain effectively. Cameron has tried to frame the issue as an attempt to bring into the public domain the unsteady relationship that Britain has with Europe and to settle the debate of whether Britain is better off in or out of Europe. Yet, Cameron's main aim has been to pacify the dissent within his own party primarily to prevent any damage that could be caused by his backbenchers or the UK Independence Party (UKIP) for his general election campaign and eventually for his next term as Prime Minister. Euroscepticism has appeared to

be a trend across the political landscape. All three major parties in the UK expressed their differing attitudes towards the EU and provided their suggestions on EU policy within their individual manifestos in the build-up to the general election. Between the parties, only the Labour Party provided any clear-cut support for Britain's membership to the EU. For example, Labour explicitly states in its manifesto, "the Conservatives are damaging the interests of our country by turning their backs on Europe, and isolating us abroad."[7] In addition to this party fighting, there is also a growing divide within the parties themselves on the issue of Europe, which must be further acknowledged and settled immediately.

Between the two main parties, the Conservatives and Labour, the Conservatives have pledged

- To have an in/out referendum on a renegotiated UK membership of the EU by 2017,
- To protect the British economy from further integration of the Eurozone,
- To scrap the Human Rights Act and introduce a British Bill of Rights.[8]

The Labour Party pledged

- To legislate for a lock that guarantees no powers from the UK can be transferred to the EU without an in/out referendum,
- To reform the EU and return Britain to a leadership role within it,
- To reform the Common Agricultural Policy,
- To reform immigration and welfare.[9]

In addition, the Liberal Democrats promoted a rather unclear and conflicting position. On the one hand, they issued a number of broad statements that were decidedly pro-EU. On the other hand, they criticized the way in which the EU operates:

> Liberal Democrats want Britain to remain a member of the EU because we are fighting for a stronger economy and British jobs... But that doesn't mean the European Union is perfect: far from it. Liberal Democrats want to reform the EU so that it concentrates on doing the things it's good at such as creating jobs, fighting climate change and combating cross-border criminal gangs, but stays out of decisions better decided at national, devolved or local levels.[10]

As the campaign developed, all three of the major parties became intent on holding an in/out referendum in some way or another. Labour's change on the issue was related to the threat of defections within their own party to UKIP due to a "loss of support among some of the working class voters"[11] while under the leadership of Ed Miliband. The current Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who in the 1975 referendum on the UK's exit from the European Economic Community voted to leave, has also had to acquiesce to party politics to prevent increasing tensions within his own party. Corbyn is a "natural and historic"[12] Eurosceptic according to Labour MPs Kate Hoey and Graham Stringer. Yet, the Labour Party under his leadership is campaigning for the UK to stay within the EU, even if no reforms will be made to the current UK-EU relationship.[13] Given the personal views Corbyn has expressed over the years, this is another instance that cannot be regarded as anything other than a strategy to prevent dissent within the party and for Corbyn to maintain his own position as leader. Corbyn's need to side with his party irrespective of his historical views is compounded by the fact that "213 of Labour's 231 MPs have signed up to the Labour's official pro-Europe campaign, Labour in for Britain, which is being run by former Labour home secretary Alan Johnson."[14]

The Liberal Democrats also followed suit regarding the in/out referendum for much the same reason. This certainly gives the impression that the calls for a referendum are more to do with settling disputes

within the individual parties themselves rather than "from a desire to renew the British people's democratic consent for EU membership."[15]

Cameron had been dealing with a growing number of Eurosceptics in the Conservative Party for several years. This can be evidenced in the Conservative Party Manifesto in 2010, whereby he pledged "to introduce a bill in Parliament which would require any new transfer of power to Brussels to be subject to a referendum."[16] At this time it was Cameron's intention to campaign on a national level for the repatriation of powers regarding the Charter of Fundamental Rights, criminal justice, and social legalization. However, this was apparently not enough to appease the hardline Eurosceptics within his party. In October 2011, a motion was introduced by the Conservative MP David Nuttal to call for a referendum. Even though Cameron's government was strongly against this measure and had instituted a three-line whip on the vote to ensure members voted in conformity with the party, 81 Conservative MPs voted in favor of the motion for a referendum.[17]

In July 2012, Cameron continued to work on appeasing his dissenting backbenchers against the real threat of his members' defection to UKIP. This resulted in the *Review of the balance of competences* between the UK and the EU. This review was intended to create an outline of what powers the UK Government should attempt to recover from the EU. However, the final review concluded that the balance of powers was about right as is. This did not help matters.

Cameron went further to appease the growing strength of his party's Eurosceptic members and stated that the "democratic consent for the EU in Britain is now wafer-thin."[18] At first, Cameron's remarks and calls for action were "well received by Tory Backbenchers."[19] However, this was at the beginning of Cameron's pledge, when he declared the need for renegotiation and more "flexibility in Europe, less regulation and more power for national parliaments."[20] Clearly, these sentiments would resound well with most Eurosceptics. Yet, we can view this as Cameron's attempt to placate his Eurosceptic backbenchers with the declaration of a referendum to be held on June 23, 2016. Now that we have an agreement of a reformed relationship with the EU, it is clear that the promises made by the Prime Minister and the outcome of his negotiations with the EU are not necessarily the same. Moreover, it is clear that the hard-line Eurosceptic will try to cause more damage to his leadership and the Conservative Party: The "ticking time-bomb" has not been defused.

Cameron's Four Areas of Reform

In a meeting with the Spanish Prime Minister on September 4, 2015, Cameron stated that there are four areas in which he would like to see reform within the EU: competiveness, sovereignty, social security, and economic governance.[21] Here, "reform" replaced the previously used word "renegotiation." In contrast to renegotiation, which implies only achieving special conditions within the EU for the UK, "reform" indicates that cooperation with all member states, as well as EU institutions, is necessary.[22] Thus, Cameron's efforts to reclaim powers and sovereignty for Britain had been tempered by his aim of enacting "reforms," to achieve a reconfiguration of Britain's EU status. Such a move is in stark contrast to the Eurosceptics, who are clamoring for secession and for the repatriation of powers from Brussels.

The four areas of reform that Cameron has sought are moderate and vague. The recent agreement reached is unlikely to satisfy Eurosceptics unless it is legally binding and changes are made to the applicable EU treaties. Hence, Cameron has been pushing for the reforms to be completed in a "formal and legally-binding and irreversible way."[23] The reality is that while the agreement is binding, some elements will have to go through the process

of secondary legislation that will only occur once the UK has voted and decided to remain in the EU.

However, the agreement Cameron has reached with the EU is legally binding as a Decision of Heads of State or Government under international law. There will be no revision of the treaties prior to the UK referendum. Other sections of the agreement will have to be amended via secondary legislation after the referendum has been held. Eurosceptics will assert that no matter what Cameron's efforts have achieved in the reaching of an agreement, it is not possible to argue that the proposed agreement on reforming UK-EU relations will result in a better deal for the UK. The subsequent legislative process must first take place in the EU Parliament, whereby it is possible that the British agreement with the EU will be changed. President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz has confirmed that it is not possible to guarantee that the proposal of reforms would be the same after the legislative process.[24] Eurosceptics will argue that ultimately all Cameron has obtained from the negotiations is a promissory note, which of course is neither legally binding nor irreversible. Eurosceptics will claim that, despite what Cameron says he has achieved, the public will be voting blindly in respect to the shape of reforms to come—if there are any reforms at all. In practical terms, the Eurosceptics will most likely choose to believe that the promises granted could very quickly be taken away by the European Parliament once the Brexit referendum has been concluded.

In essence, the package of reforms that Cameron has obtained are likely to be criticized for not being worth the paper they are printed on. Below we set out the four main areas of reform David Cameron has reached with the EU, competitiveness, sovereignty, social security, and economic governance, and consider whether these efforts support his campaign to remain in a reformed EU or the pro-Brexit campaign:

Competitiveness refers to the single market and regulations that burden British business, which is often cited as one of the main reasons to leave the EU. The pro-Brexit campaigners consistently cite the burdensome regulations and the overall ability of Britain to compete in global markets, especially in the services sector, as their prime target for reform. As for global markets, Cameron himself expressed his desire for "the EU to conclude ambitious new trade deals with the United States, with Japan and with Mercosur – the South American trading bloc."[25] Cameron believes that the EU is doing more to cut burdensome regulations but needs to do more for the single market.

The formal agreement reached is not very specific in the methods to be taken in order to achieve this, but the Commission has agreed to "continue its efforts to make EU law simpler to reduce regulatory burden for EU business operators [...] by applying the 2015 Better Regulation Agenda, including in particular the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT). Cutting red tape for entrepreneurship, in particular small and medium size enterprises, remains an overarching goal for all of us in delivering growth and jobs."[26]

While the EU has promised to do more, Eurosceptics will pounce on this speech as meaningless bureaucratic drivel, admitting that although more should be done nothing meaningful will be achieved. This tepid concession will undoubtedly provide ammunition for the Brexit campaign to argue that the EU is not working in the interests of the UK and that any meaningful attempts at cutting the red tape are futile.

Sovereignty—in particular the loss of British sovereignty to Brussels—is at the core of the Eurosceptic debate. As Cameron is fighting to appease his Eurosceptic backbenchers, he must be seen as having achieved meaningful reform to satisfy the Eurosceptics and restore cohesion within his own party. According to a January 2015 report

by Chatham House, "Britain's relationship with the EU can not be settled until there is some form of fixed end-point for wider European integration—a prospect that seems elusive, given the nature of an 'ever closer union.'" [27]

In Cameron's November 10, 2015 letter to the President of the European Council, he unequivocally stated that he wished to end Britain's obligation to work towards further political integration.[28] This would require an amendment to the Treaty of Lisbon, which, as discussed earlier, there is no intention to do prior to the UK referendum. Any revision to the treaties "may well have to withstand a legal challenge in the European Court of Justice."[29] It has, however, been argued that the current agreement is legally binding as a "Decision of Heads of State or Government" under international law. Thus, although the recent agreement reached in Brussels explicitly states that the phrase "ever closer union" does not apply to the UK, the UK is still bound by the treaty's continuous use of the phrase, promising further integration until revisions are made. Although Cameron can claim this as a victory, as well as that the EU is willing to grant the UK opt-outs upon further integration, Eurosceptics will argue that the agreement is not legally binding and carries the threat of being challenged by the EU.

Extending sovereignty also gives national parliaments an enhanced role in preventing undesired EU legislation from being enacted into national law. The agreement reached allows national parliaments to collectively veto EU legislation provided they have the support of 14 other EU member states' parliaments.[30] Eurosceptics want the UK to have the ability to veto the application of any EU legislation by "imposing a return to unanimity voting on all matters, with the special twist that it would be for any national parliament to opt out of any EU law."[31] This "red card" system, involving collective support of 14 member states, is one of the reforms Brussels has been willing to concede to the UK but is unattractive and underwhelming to any Eurosceptic. As stated by William Hague in 2008, it is nearly impossible to veto EU legislation within the present system:

> Given the difficulty of Oppositions winning a vote in their Parliaments, the odds against doing so in 14 countries around Europe with different parliamentary recesses – lasting up to 10 weeks in our own case – are such that even if the European Commission proposed the slaughter of the first-born it would be difficult to achieve such a remarkable conjunction of parliamentary votes.[32]

Cameron's concession from the EU may not be enough to appease the Eurosceptics into accepting his reformed agenda regarding the use of national parliaments as a preventive measure against further EU legislation.

Social security reform aims to amend EU migration and social benefits for those seeking employment—so-called "welfare tourism." Immigration in the UK has for a long time been an issue that has driven the public against the EU. In January 2014, "the issue of EU migrants came to the fore of the British debate, leading Cameron to contemplate imposing controls on EU migration which is unlawful under the Single European Act."[33] This is a crucial area for Cameron if he is to sway opinion and have Eurosceptics support the idea that Britain is better in a reformed Europe. For a hard-line Eurosceptic, any concession or mitigation would be the dividing line between reconciliation and further hostility and division.

The debate was not initially aimed at those who are legally employed and entitled to receive benefits, as they also have to pay into the social welfare system. The fundamental issue is based on migrants who take advantage of the right of freedom of movement and become a burden on the state. Yet, as time has passed and agreement has been reached, this issue has become expressed

in two ways: in-work benefits and child benefits.

Cameron had pledged that those "coming to Britain from the EU must live here and contribute for four years before they qualify for in-work benefits or social housing."[34] However, this measure has faced some stern opposition from other member states over the fundamental right of freedom of movement. John Springford of the Centre for European Reform has said, "any four-year waiting time would constitute discrimination under EU law."[35] This was precisely the stance Konrad Szymański, Poland's Europe minister, had taken: "We understand British concerns. They have the right to shape their labour market. The issue is discrimination."[36] It is vital for Cameron that any future agreement is binding as this is an important issue for Eurosceptics. However, this is one of the issues that must go through the European Parliament's legislative process. The issue of discrimination could be an important factor that may very well result in a fundamentally different measure being instituted. Eurosceptics will vaguely state that any agreement reached is not going to be applicable as there are still many challenges ahead.

Interestingly, the EU Court of Justice has recently provided a precedent for Cameron's position: those who are exercising their right to freedom of movement but do not intend to find employment or have not found employment are not entitled to social benefits. There are two cases wherein judgments by the Court would support Cameron's plan of withholding benefits from those out of work. The judgment in Case C-333/13 Dano in November 2014 held, "Member states may exclude from entitlement to social assistance EU citizens who arrive in their territory without intending to find a job."[37] The second is Case C-67/14 Alimanovic in September 2015 where it was held that in certain circumstances migrants "who were searching for work but were without employment" could be denied benefits.[38] Perhaps these two cases can help allay any fears of discrimination affecting the final shape and result of the reform going through the European Parliament. Yet, it is likely to be ineffective against Eurosceptics arguments that the UK will have to vote blindly in the referendum as these measures can only be finalized once the UK has agreed to remain part of the EU.

Yet, these cases may prove to be unnecessary for Britain to limit migration and the benefits associated with the right of free movement within the EU. Prior to the agreement, Tusk had stated that the UK does indeed have a problem with the level of migration into the country, and this in turn puts extra stress on British public services.[39] As such, the measure that has been achieved by Cameron's reforms acts as an "emergency brake" for in-work benefits. This emergency brake could last for seven years, according to the current agreement—which is certainly longer than the five-year ban that Nigel Farage of UKIP had been pressing for.[40] Eurosceptics will question whether the duration would be long enough to have any lasting effect. Further, they will claim that because the agreement is required to go through the European Parliament, it will not be known until later what measures are required to prevent the current level of migration. A number of Conservative MPs have also already condemned the "emergency brake" proposal as meaningless in curbing the rise of the number of foreigners.[41] Eurosceptics believe that placing restrictions on benefits will not stem the flow of migration to the UK. Rather, it is the appeal of much higher wages than in their home states that is causing the problem.[42] In practice, the agreement reached by Cameron with the EU will have very little if any effect on the existing social security problem in the UK.

Currently there are "millions of pounds of child benefits paid to EU nationals who are already living in the UK."[43] This number will grow if EU migration is not curbed. In the Conservative Party Manifesto 2015, it is unequivocally stated that "[i]f an EU migrant's child is living abroad then they should receive no child benefit, no matter how long they have worked in the UK and no matter how much tax they have paid."[44] This statement would obviously have satisfied Eurosceptics and may have kept them

quiet until now. However, the difference between the Party Manifesto and the agreed-upon measures are quite different. The newly negotiated agreement awards benefits to new migrants' children even if the child is not living in Britain, although the rate of child support is reduced according to the child's country of residence. The reduced rate, however, would not apply to those living in the UK for more than four years, which means "there are still 150,000 migrants who will be able to carry on receiving the higher British rate and even send it back home to their children in their native country"[45] until 2020. This is an extraordinary amount of money that will potentially leave the country.

It is doubtful that Cameron's efforts will be enough to persuade the Eurosceptics to agree to remain in the EU. Given the terms promised in the Conservative Manifesto 2015, Cameron's recent efforts to reform social security support the longstanding view that Britain is unable to negotiate and obtain the right policies to allow it to effectively protect and govern itself. This will certainly be good ammunition for Eurosceptic campaigns.

Economic governance reforms sought by Cameron are designed to protect the nine countries that are members of the EU but not of the Eurozone. Cameron's initiative has been to reorganize the block of 28 nations to prevent those not in the Eurozone from being dominated by the other 19 member states.

There are a few different elements affecting this area of reform. The first was an explicit statement from Cameron that the Euro is not the only currency in Europe and that it is not mandatory for all members to join the Euro. Cameron took this position so that the "non-Euro countries should never be financially liable for operations to support the Eurozone as a currency."[46] The EU conceded this as part of the agreement. While to many this detailed exemption does not represent much, it is the wider implication Cameron can champion as a meaningful reform: Britain can remain part of the EU without having to further integrate. Additionally, Cameron sought to achieve safeguards to protect the integrity of the single market while also ensuring that British businesses would not be discriminated against or disadvantaged because they do not use the Euro. The Prime Minister sought reform whereby the Eurozone voting as a bloc could not outvote non-Eurozone members. The EU thus agreed that it is only necessary for one non-Eurozone member to "indicate their reasoned opposition"[47] to a proposal being supported by Eurozone members to the EU Council who, in turn, will debate the measure being proposed and attempt to facilitate an appropriate solution. This concession will be championed as a success for the Brexit opponents, who will say that Cameron has negotiated a strong and lasting safeguard for protecting the nine member states from undesirable decisions that are taken on behalf of the Eurozone. In contrast, Eurosceptics will argue that the safeguard does not go far enough in that it only permits the UK to raise an objection to a proposal without the concomitant right to veto a proposal being considered. Eurosceptics will argue the two concepts are entirely different.

To his success, Cameron secured as part of the agreement of UK-EU relations that the UK would never have to take on the position Germany did in bailing out Greece with German taxpayer money. Failing to secure such an agreement would have crippled any attempt for the pro-EU campaign to say that Britain is stronger in Europe, since it would be evident that Britain was propping up a crumbling Union and receiving much less than it puts into it. Yet, it is still likely that Eurosceptics will say the reforms in this area are not extensive enough.

The Threat of the Break-up of Britain

The divide within parties themselves is a grave cause for concern in Britain and is something that can only be settled by way of a referendum. The UK needs the Brexit referendum to settle infighting within the individual parties and in order to have a clear direction in which to govern the UK. However, the referendum itself could have larger ramifications for Britain as a whole and could well dismantle the United Kingdom. As the referendum includes Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, this "opens up the idea of a breakup of the UK rather than of a simple Brexit."[48] This bizarre outcome is possible if the vast majority of England votes to leave the EU, yet Scotland, Wales, and, in particular, Northern Ireland vote to remain. In this scenario, the yes vote for a Brexit would still prevail overall. However, if this is the outcome of the vote, it is quite possible that the other territories would campaign to secede from the UK in order to remain in the EU. This opinion has been echoed by the historically Eurosceptic William Hague.[49]

Now that Cameron has reached a final agreement with the EU it will be up to the voters to decide whether a reformed EU would be better than leaving it entirely. An extended debate, based on the recent EU concessions, on whether remaining part of Europe would be better than leaving it will take place between now and June 23, 2016. For both Wales and Northern Ireland, the subsidies and investments provided and made by the EU are an economic lifeline that cannot be ignored when considering the outcome of the Brexit referendum.

For Wales, Brexit could have a massive impact on the economy and livelihood of many citizens. Providing security for Welsh workers, "the loss of European Structural Funds would be a particularly bitter blow."[50] Further, "the Welsh Labour Group has argued the country would lose out on £838 million every year and nearly 200,000 jobs would be lost if the UK left the EU."[51] Social provisions for Welsh workers have eroded under recent UK governments, with average Welsh incomes dropping drastically as Westminster is more focused on the global marketing of London.[52] The potential loss of income and employment for Welsh workers will certainly have a significant impact on the outcome of the referendum vote.

Wales is also far more dependent on the Common Agricultural Policy than anywhere else in Britain. The amount of funding from the Common Agricultural Policy to Welsh farmers has been assessed to be approximately £185 per person annually.[53] This loss would be devastating. Yet, with all the loss in funding for farming and social support the EU already provides, polls suggest that 42% of the Welsh population would vote to leave the EU, while 40% would vote to remain.[54]

Although Wales has benefitted greatly from membership in the EU, the EU is more deeply ingrained into the culture of Northern Ireland because of its direct impact on the peace process. Debate in Northern Ireland over the referendum regarding Brexit has been more focused on the "socioeconomic and historical rifts that have marked the region for decades."[55]

Northern Ireland has also received vast sums in subsidies and investments from the EU. "From 2007 to 2013, the EU has spent 2.4 billion euros"[56] in efforts to facilitate and maintain peace in the region. The fact that both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are part of the EU has helped to promote positive economic and social relations.

Will Straw, the executive director for the Britain Stronger in Europe group, has said that leaving the EU would lead to the loss of jobs and slow growth, as well as result in higher cost of living in Northern Ireland.[57]

Although the conflict in Northern Ireland has been subdued for the most part, the loss of jobs along with a decline in trade with the Republic of Ireland would certainly rekindle the conflict.[58] Perhaps for these reasons 58% of people in Northern Ireland are in favor of remaining a part of the EU.[59]

Based on these facts, it would be expected that as further information is disseminated to the public on the pros and cons of EU membership, there is a real threat that Northern Ireland and Wales would choose to remain within the EU.

However, during the debate on the recent referendum regarding Scotland's independence, there were strong debates on whether or not Scotland would be able to continue being a member of the EU if it did secede. There are certainly questions as to whether a second Scottish referendum as a result of the Brexit vote is plausible. At the moment it is estimated that around "two-thirds of Scotland's voters"[60] support remaining in the EU. Further, it must be accepted that the political landscape now is very different from that of the Scottish vote that took place in 2014. The price of oil is currently in rapid decline and when in conjunction with the lack of direction on a currency, the option of Scotland breaking away is economically more perilous than it had been.

Even if Scotland did join the EU, the loss of British investment combined with tariffs on exports to the UK is still more costly than the benefits received by being a member of the EU and the Single Market.[61] The UK accounts for 65% of Scottish exports.[62] The benefits gained from leaving the UK and joining the EU would not outweigh the benefits Scotland receives from membership. Further, Scotland's independent EU membership would be a Herculean task. Scotland would still need to have all remaining European member states vote on its accession to the EU. However, given that tension between Spain and its "Catalan separatists has only grown hotter since 2014,"[63] it is more likely that Spain would be even more intent on vetoing any attempt by Scotland to secede and join the EU than it had been in 2014. Yet, Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has said that there "would be an inescapable shift in public opinion towards independence if the UK voted to leave and Scotland faced being dragged out of the EU against its will."[64]

This possible shift is the primary difficulty in assessing whether the UK will remain united. With regard to these circumstances, it is quite possible that Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland will vote to remain a part of the EU and may wish to secede from the UK if only the votes counted from England lead to a Brexit. However, the struggle and potential obstacles to retaining or reapplying for EU membership could prevent such a scenario and may well play in voters' minds when deciding which side to take in the referendum. Would it be better to stay with Britain or face the tumultuous and strenuous uphill battle of going alone while attempting to re-join the EU, even though there is no guarantee that that may ever happen? This inevitably will lead to the most likely outcome when the polls are open and voters go to cast their ballots. Even after all the arguments and facts are given by both sides, voters will actually vote based on their gut feelings. Perhaps this ultimately will preserve the Union.

Conclusion

The need for the referendum is integral to Britain's survival. All parties acknowledge that it is necessary in some measure as each have sought to quell dissent amongst their backbenchers. However, the inability to govern the country effectively until this matter is settled poses a real threat to the future of Britain. In this respect, the referendum is of the utmost importance. It has yet to be determined whether the reforms that David Cameron has achieved will be enough to satisfy Eurosceptics. Although Cameron has made a number of concessions to placate them, Cameron's four aims do not incorporate the primary desires of hard-liners, which include "demands for opt-outs from social or employment laws, for transfers of power back to national governments, for a new national veto or for quotas on EU migrants."[65]

There may be some voters who share the position of Matt Warman of the Conservative Party, who said, "I am pleasantly surprised by the EU deal the Prime Minister has brought back from Brussels... I'd leave the Europe we are in today; but this hard-won deal changes it significantly and for the better."[66] It is unlikely, however, that most will be as persuaded to back Cameron's negotiated deal with the EU. If Cameron's agreement with Brussels does not go far enough to quell the Eurosceptics and the referendum results in a slim majority voting to remain in the EU, there could very well be further problems for the UK. A slim majority could further enflame tensions within political parties, causing further disruption to the ability of the UK to pursue its national interests. Yet, if the referendum results in the decision to leave the EU, then there will be far more serious problems with debilitating consequences, such as the actual dismantling of the UK itself. Thus, while Eurosceptics continue to proclaim that Britain can be stronger by bringing back powers from Brussels, it is, in contrast, likely to leave behind a much weaker and isolated UK, which will have lasting repercussions for future generations.

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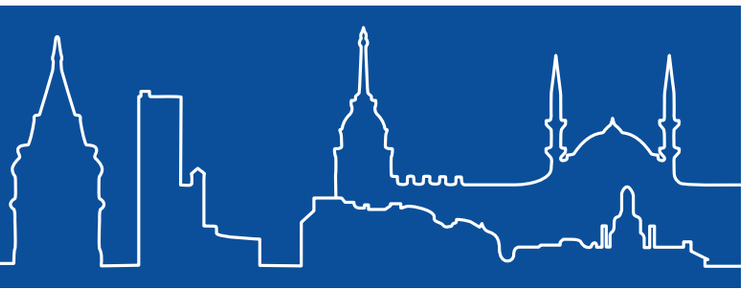
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