

THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REST OF EUROPE

A PAPER FOR THE TRUE & FAIR PARTY

v2



True & Fair

we deserve better

Introduction

1. Over the past 7 years, since the Brexit campaign began, the UK has seen two significant things occur: the UK has left the EU, through the so called Brexit process and, at the same time, we have seen the rise of the small, but beautiful UK True & Fair Party, subsuming in its progress the absorption of the Renew Party. It might be broadly true to say that the second event portrays a reaction and rebellion against the first, exacerbated by endemic corruption and incompetence in the ruling Conservative Party.
2. This short Paper does not attempt to go over old ground, as most Britons now are fully aware of the unfortunate impact of Brexit and reactions vary from glee, through disgust & frustration, to boredom and even a sense of ennui.
3. As a great man once said, we are where we are and we now need to move on, in a political environment, where varying polls underline the wishes of between 60-80% of the UK population who consider Brexit to have been at the very least unsatisfactory and many would say disastrous. Allied with this perception, a significant number (possibly 60-70% now, depending upon which polls and newspapers you read) believe that, in spite of the perceived difficulties in renegotiating some form of move back into the rest of Europe, it must be done, if only to save the British economy¹.
4. We will examine below, in more detail, the relevant factors, amongst others, concerning the Economy and the perspectives from the point of view of Britons outside the UK and particularly the viewpoint from the EU and its political “wing”.

Aim

5. To examine current and future UK links with the rest of Europe, in a political and economic context.

General Outline

6. The Paper will examine:
 - a. Current UK political context
 - b. The economic impact of Brexit
 - c. The status of Britons outside the UK
 - d. The EU perspective – how do other Europeans perceive Britain?
 - e. Possible options for the UK in a changing Europe

1. The word ‘British’ will be used when referring to the UK, although technically the latter refers to Britain & N Ireland. The word ‘Briton’ will refer to someone carrying a British passport.

Current UK political context

7. It is not the intention to examine the creation or history of the setting up of the True & Fair Party here. Suffice to say, the current British spectrum of essentially three main Parties, has been decried by many, under the banner of “First Past The Post”, relying as it has for millennia, on the so called “Good Chap Principle”. This has, under the current (Tory) government, proved lamentably ineffective and not fit for purpose. In doing so, it has excluded some 5 million Britons living in Europe and elsewhere² overseas, including the loss of local voting rights, for Britons in Europe (post Brexit) and loss of voting rights in the UK, for those living overseas for more than 15 years (now finally rescinded)
8. From the point of view, of this significant overseas presence of passport-holding Britons, the impact of the above situation, has varied from outrage, through despair and apathy, as the British government has palpably failed to consider this large percentage of ‘external’ British citizens, during the Brexit process; and subsequently, as Embassies have been strangled of resources and, themselves, information. Elsewhere, this has been compared to being “treated like mushrooms, kept in the dark and fed on manure”. This frustration and anger has led some Britons to take out passports with their host nation, or for example to seek Irish passports. For some this has worked, regaining Freedom of Movement and other benefits, but the more elderly and those with learning difficulties have found it difficult to pass the relevant host nation language tests.
9. What is without doubt is that this has led to some 35 pressure groups, many British led (but not all), seeking to ameliorate, or reverse the impact and process of Brexit. We shall say more about the perspective from the EU hierarchy below. Meanwhile this pressure and a growing realisation of trouble to come and schadenfreude in the British government has seen the failure and reversal of Britain’s withdrawal from schemes such as ERASMUS. Meanwhile on the mainland Continent³, we have seen a growing movement to seek EU citizenship for the 20 million (approx) “foreigners/immigrants” currently living, working and even owning property, in mainland Europe (see ECIT et al, www.ecit-foundation.eu).

2. The numbers of Britons living & working outside the UK are shrouded in doubt. Until Brexit started to bite, it was thought that up to 2 million Britons lived with the EU and fringe continental nations. The key countries were Spain (over 300,000), France (173,000), Italy, Germany, Holland and others. It has been established that the number in France, living or holding second homes, has fallen by 30-60,000, with Britons moving back to the UK. These numbers are still to be confirmed and may vary upwards again, with the rescinding of the 15-year Rule and revised Visa rules

3. Whether we like it or not, the UK is geographically part of the European continental shelf. Indeed, until historically recently, we were joined by a land bridge to France. At our closest point, we are only 22 miles from the 28 nations that make up the EU, plus a series of what President Macron refers to, as the outer European group of States.

The economic impact of Brexit - UK Finances

11. Someone once said (ascribed to no less a person than UK PM Benjamin Disraeli) that there are “Lies, damned lies and statistics”. What seems in no doubt that, try as they may, the current government has, since 2016, engineered a series of economic shocks to the British economy, amounting to several hundred billion pounds sterling, in lost trade, EU punitive tariffs and lost overseas investment. To be an island and circulate currency and wealth within this island is not enough. Nor can the much vaunted “Services industry” carry the rest of the British economy. Britain needs to enable other markets outside the UK and we see, lately, that even the current government is starting to realise this too late, with its desperate attempts (some counter-effective such as the Agreements raised with Australia & NZ) to draw up Trade Agreements elsewhere; largely ignoring the vast Trade Bloc on our very doorstep, where some estimate we currently have a £92 billion annual trade deficit.

12. All of this, as our National Debt rises to equal our ability to earn, as a measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is now self-evident that something serious “must be done” and a large proportion of Britons, both inside and outside the UK, feel that this must in one form or another, entail rejoining the Single Market, either under the Norwegian/Canadian models, or as a fully-fledged Member of the EU.

The EU perspective – how do other Europeans perceive Britain?

13. The above leads us to examine the other side of the coin (sic); firstly as fellow Europeans (even Tories must reluctantly acknowledge that Britons live on the European continental shelf) and secondly and more specifically the political body that currently leads and manages one of the three main political & trading global blocs, alongside China & India and the USA.
14. Living as the author does, in France and as president of a 400 strong multi-cultural group, numbering 19 different languages, one is fairly well equipped to judge the attitudes of the average mainland European.
15. Initially the Brexit saga engendered various degrees of wonder, amusement and sympathy. This has transformed over the past 7 years, through scorn, open mouthed amazement and laughter, to outright pity and a pat on the back. Very, very few are prepared to even consider following our example, even those who are confronting the reality of numbers significantly higher than our own, of refugees, flooding into the European mainland.

The EU Organisation

16. Contrary to Hard Right assertions of disastrous progress for the EU, the EU is not perceived by most to be on the edge of disaster; and while it is true that notably Hungary has been the bad boy of EU politics, this has been more about one individual and his search for power, than a basic disagreement within the EU. Viktor Orban came back into the fold, very recently, when the EU Council threatened to vote without him (on membership of Sweden). Turkey in spite of vacillation by its autocratic leader, is still keen to join; and we see other countries queuing up, under threat from Russia, to move closer to the EU and NATO. Indeed, in all of this, it would be surprising if, in a family of currently 28 nations, there were not the occasional disagreements. Even the United States was once a group of independent countries/states.
17. Meanwhile the upper echelons of the EU have an ambivalent attitude to the UK. On the one hand it is a group of individuals, but it is also a cabal of like-minded politicians, who must govern one of the 3 global power blocs and still smarting from the withdrawal of one of its founding, senior members, only 7 years ago. As individuals, they may well voice support for the return of Britain, but its withdrawal created enormous amounts of work, to “eject” us, at the expense of other more productive work within the Bloc. Cries of “Perfidious Albion” were often expressed and a natural reluctance to let us back in, following the confusion caused by unpicking 40 years of bureaucracy.
18. As a grouping of some 28 nations, feelings are also mixed. A large proportion assert that Britain is an essential member of such a power bloc, in terms of soft and hard power, but it is highly unlikely that we could return on the favourable basis forged by Thatcher. However it can be stated that both France & Spain have both recently shown sympathy at Parliamentary level, to British house/home owners in their respective countries; and certainly in the southern half of France (less affected by 300 years of war), the French take pride in speaking English.
19. It must be mentioned however, that the EU bloc has recently decided to strengthen its boundaries, by imposing an electronic scheme, similar to the USA, involving digital recognition, at borders. This is NOT aimed at the British, but it reinforces the security of nations inside the EU and is yet another barrier, for those “outside”.
20. So, what happens if the UK decides to reapply for EU Membership, at some level, post a General Election? Given that the 2 front running options appear to be some form of entry into the Single Market (Norwegian or Canadian options seem to be popular), this is one possibility. It would hurdle a massive tariff penalty, currently ‘assisting’ a UK £92 billion trade deficit, but would leave an embittered group of hard Right/ Brexiters et al, slowly coming to terms with NOT being at the Top Table for decision making and, while the Britons are famously fond of compromise, it would probably be the half in, half out worst of both worlds.

21. The other option is the ‘full Monty’: applying to rejoin the EU, as a full Member, under Article 49, see here (below):

Article 49
(ex Article 49 TEU)

Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act **unanimously** after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account.

22. As the Article makes plain, the UK would need to apply officially, presumably after a third Referendum (the first was back in 1973) to rejoin and a degree of EU unanimity would be required. It is not intended here, to second guess the conditions which might, or might not be imposed, but a certain amount of humble pie would undoubtedly be required. We can say with some certainty that the smaller constituent parts of the UK would almost certainly be in accord now, with this second option, of rejoining.
23. What do our fellow Europeans get out of it? Despite the Brexit contingent seeking to disparage the “unelected bureaucrats of Brussels”, most intelligent members of the EU hierarchy fully recognise the values of having the UK rejoin. Given that the days of Churchill, Thatcher et al, saw us helping to lay the groundwork of today’s EU, given the representation of British Ministers (including the PM) in the EU Council and elected MEPs in the EU Parliament, given the raft of high flying civil servants helping to draft laws & regulations, given the extra military weight (albeit currently depleted) added to NATO, the Brexit gibe about bureaucratic Brussels rings very false.
24. Finally, there are many EU members, who see the UK as the third leg of a European ‘stool’ that links us with Germany and France. (Remove one leg and it falls over!)

Conclusions

25. Given the geopolitical status of the UK, on the Continental shelf, coupled with the loss of empire and a disastrous decade for our financial resources & assets, one could assert that it makes strong sense, both in geopolitical terms, but also in mutual security, to rebuild links with the EU and the rest of Europe. Like it or not, Little England can no longer 'cut it' and we need to cosy up to the EU, as one of the 3 major global power blocs, facing both the Chinese and American blocs (the latter may change direction substantially if Trump is elected); and with the rapidly emerging India, as the dark horse.
26. The UK is not in a good position, with the National Debt equalling our current annual GDP, with our Armed Forces run down to the point of despair and with our population voting some 80% against the outcomes of Brexit and for a reconsideration of some form of link with the massive trade & security bloc next door.
27. On a more optimistic note, most of the 28 nations currently represented in the EU and its Parliament, would be positive about rebuilding stronger links with the UK. There would need to be some form of consensus amongst our fellow Europeans and undoubtedly one or two countries would be cynical and looking for some form of guarantee. I will leave this issue, for another day.

Recommendation

29. That the UK strongly considers reforging links with the EU.

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