

A European's viewpoint

Cameron and Europe, a case of Pascal's Wager

*BY DUSAN SIDJANSKI**



This analysis begins at the end: the United Kingdom is destined to remain within the EU, which indeed is what its Prime Minister would prefer. By making a referendum on Britain's continued membership contingent upon his election victory, he is solving the problem by letting the people decide and thereby putting an end to any uncertainty.

The elections held on 7 May 2015 created two major surprises. The victory of the Conservatives who obtained 321 seats, and the electoral landslide of the SNP, winning 56 out of 59 seats under the dynamic leadership of Nicola Sturgeon. The big losers: the Labour party with only 232 seats, the Lib Dems who ended up with just 8 MPs down from 56, and UKIP with only 1 seat in parliament despite the fact that it won 12.6% of the electorate. This electoral upheaval has uncovered profound divisions, under pressure from separatist leanings, which are undermining the United Kingdom's unity. This explains why London is prepared to concede fiscal autonomy to Scotland while retaining sovereign powers. A second divide between pro- and anti-European supporters is splitting the Conservative Party. The pro-European Labour Party and SNP are pitted against the populist, Europhobic UKIP.

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This new context has forced Cameron to adopt a new strategy. His first reaction has been to offer Tory Eurosceptics choice positions according to the Italian method of integrating opponents in order to better control them. What's more he has embarked on a tour of European capitals seeking to win support in Paris, Berlin and elsewhere for reforms to the Lisbon Treaty: greater flexibility, less red tape, repatriation of certain powers to Westminster, immigration control and combatting "benefits tourism". Such fundamental changes, as in the case of any proposed reforms, will take years to negotiate. That being so, how should one interpret the fact that the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary are advising the people to vote "out" if they don't obtain concessions from the other 27 Member States? Are they seriously prepared to commit such a reckless act which would prove suicidal for their country and prejudicial for Europe?

The hard facts prove the United Kingdom's close intertwining with the European economy and even with European society. Let's look at a few figures which demonstrate that the Union is one of the United Kingdom's key partners: it accounts for 53% of intra-EU trade, while the majority of direct investments come from Europe. 4.2 million jobs depend on exports to the EU. On an impulse would the British Government throw away the advantages provided by the single market, its security and high purchasing power? Moreover, I doubt that Cameron would be prepared to sacrifice the support of British business and the City, which both advocate remaining in the EU. The Chair of the *Independent Advisory Panel* of the governmental *Regional Growth Fund* assured me that when the time comes he will throw all his weight behind the "in" camp. As for Scotland, a vote to leave the EU would only speed up its march towards independence, setting a precedent for other regions demanding more autonomy. Europe has become politicised.

At the international level the prospects are bleak. Since the British Parliament voted against a military intervention in Syria as proposed by France and the US, the *special relationship* with the United States has worn thin. America's privileged partners are now Germany and France, the major economic power together with the political-military ally. Isolated, the United Kingdom is likely to lose its international status, which it shares with France as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a nuclear power and its capacity to intervene for peace. At a time when external threats are increasing, it is unthinkable that a British government would endanger its economy, its political unity and its influence on the international scene. Which is why I'm placing my wager on two winners, the European Union and the United Kingdom.