A European’s viewpoint

**Brexit, to be or not to be?**

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The EU referendum campaign is far from a model of democracy. It is a forewarning of a new era of uncertainty with Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP, at the helm. Both are promising sovereignty and free trade in a globalised world and prosperity for the British people. The more «credible» of the two leaders travels up and down the country in his red campaign bus proclaiming «We send the EU £350 million a week, let’s fund our NHS instead». However these figures do not take into account the concessions obtained by Lady Thatcher and the EU structural funds or its subsidies which fund agriculture and research. Since when has it been fair play for a campaign to falsify figures? Such underhand behaviour reached new heights when Boris Johnson asserted that the EU aspires to create a European superstate in the same way as Napoleon did, or worse still Hitler! Is it even imaginable that Napoleon or Hitler would have allowed a referendum to be conducted to decide whether a country would remain under their control? The very comparison brings discredit on this former Etonian and Oxford scholar who aspires to supplant his schoolboy rival David Cameron. Moreover, the recent assassination of a young MP does not bode well for British democracy.

Forecasts made by HM Treasury, the Bank of England and various financial institutes predict a fall in GNP per capita of between 1% and 3% or even 4% and 5%. In the event of Brexit, the UK’s loss of direct access to the single market of 500 million consumers would require protracted negotiations. What would be the reaction of foreign capital investment in British industry, in particular the car industry but also the flourishing service sector which currently benefit from the largest and richest market in the world? Will we see massive relocation of businesses, a brain-drain and the departure of a large number of Europeans who contribute to

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the prosperity of the United Kingdom? What will be the impact on the City and on its surrounding network?

Brexit would have immense political consequences, the first of which would be another independence referendum in Scotland followed by one in Northern Ireland. Worse still, the peace acquired in this region through membership of the EU would be in danger of being compromised by the reintroduction of borders and a resurgence of fighting. Great Britain might become little England. Its influence in the world would irrevocably decline. Its privileged partnership with the United States, which was already weakened, would suffer even more and the divided United Kingdom would have even less global clout.

David Cameron has warned his fellow Britons: there is no turning back after Brexit. If one day Britain were to rejoin the EU, it would be under the most severe conditions: unmitigated membership of Schengen and the eurozone, there would be no Thatcherian concessions. Faced with such high risks, wouldn’t it make sense for the Queen, so greatly respected and whose opinion counts for so many of her subjects, to voice her disapproval of the break-up of the United Kingdom under her reign? My ultimate hope is that the British people, renowned for their pragmatism, will not vote for a mythical past but will choose a European future as opposed to splendid isolation.