

The euro scepticism in the uk politics essay



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United Kingdom, also known as the UK, is a sovereign state consisted of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The relationships between the UK and the European Union have still been complex. Indeed, UK has benefited from a specific status in the EU. However, a recent poll showed that a majority of British people would agree for leaving the EU. How to explain that scepticism about the European expansion? Firstly, we will talk about the historical place of UK in Europe since the end of World War II. Then, this will lead us to develop the current affairs about the euro-scepticism in the UK. Eventually, we will conclude with the potential consequences of a British exit.

Historical part

After the end of World War II, the nationalist sentiment was strengthened in the UK. Indeed, the UK was the only state which resisted against Nazism for one year. British people saw the new European Union as a loser's coalition. Moreover, a large consensus existed in the country and both, the labor party and the conservative party, agreed about this. That's why, when the six pioneers (France, Belgium, Italia, Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) first asked UK for joining the union in 1950, the labor party which was in power at the time, refused the offer in order to protect its coal and steel industries.

During the fifties, encouraged by the USA, UK changed its position and became in favor of a free trade area. However, UK didn't want to a customs union and the agreement fell through.

In 1961, at the same time as the Republic of Ireland and Denmark, the conservative Prime Minister Macmillan decided to open some negotiations to enter the European Union. However, France through De Gaulle was opposed to this idea. He vetoed the entry for political reasons such as the American influence over UK for example. So, two applications for membership were turned down in 1963 and 1967. The resignation of De Gaulle in 1969 will mark a fresh start for UK/EU relationships.

After two unsuccessful applications for membership, Edward Heath who was Prime Minister took the United Kingdom into the European Community in 1973. The Labor party, led by Harold Wilson, was obviously against that choice and promised to hold a referendum to leave EU if they won the next elections in 1974. In 1975, after the rise to power of the Labor party, a referendum was held. Eventually, British people voted to stay in the European Community.

On one hand, the Labor Party became even more interested in Europe when some social issues were raised by European laws. On the other hand, the Conservative Party gradually started turning against the idea of euro-integration, which accelerated with their new leader from 1975, Margaret Thatcher.

Margaret Thatcher, who became Prime Minister in 1979, openly expressed her very negative attitude towards the EEC. The period of her service was marked by an increasing political isolation of Britain from Europe. She was ardently against complete economic, political and social integration. She argued that Britain contributed much more to the European budget than the

other countries and she thought that something had to be done about it. In response, in 1984 Margaret Thatcher's government negotiated a rebate on the British contribution, and thus received some of its money back. The main reason for this was the fact that a great share of the European budget is spent on the Common Agricultural Policy and since farming does not represent a major sector in the UK economy, Britain felt that it benefited much less than other countries. Also, for Margaret Thatcher, Britain was losing its independence and sovereignty by transferring the power of decision-making to Brussels.

During the nineties, Margaret Thatcher and her successor John Major lead heavy negotiations about the European expansion. The conservative party feared to lose a part of the British identity and its country's sovereignty. John Major was often isolated with the European partners during the European negotiations. Moreover, a part of the british population was becoming euro-sceptic and lobbied the government. As a result, the UK by John Major and his conservative government only accepted some parts of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Indeed, they refused two essential points: the social chapter (which will be signed in 1997 by the Tony Blair and his Labour government), and most of all, single currency. Besides, for example, UK (such as Ireland) has also negotiated opt-outs from the individuals area of free movement called Shengen and continues to operate systematic border controls with other EU members. This is the whole of these particularities which make this so specific status of the UK in the Europe Union.

The Current affairs

Since the beginning of the year, the euro-scepticism in the UK has returned centre-stage. Indeed, a speech of David Cameron, UK's prime minister, and a recent poll opened the controversy about the UK's position in the European Union again.

Although he ruled out the idea of a In/Out referendum in the 14th of January on the famous BBC, David Cameron, the conservative Prime Minister of UK, eventually announced that he wanted to give " a simple choice" between staying or leaving the EU. So if Cameron wins next election, there will probably be a referendum before 2017. The Euro-sceptics, very numerous in the Conservative Party, welcomed this news as a result of a long campaign for a vote. More accurately, David Cameron wants to renegotiate the agreement with Brussels and the British relationship with EU before giving British citizens the right to choose.

Against the criticism which deplored that the referendum doesn't take place now, Cameron said holding such a referendum now would be a " false choice" because Europe was set to change following the euro-zone crisis and it would be " wrong to ask people whether to stay or go before we have had a chance to put the relationship right". The British Prime Minister lived on the edge towards his European partners. Besides, this statement caused a lot of reactions by the European political establishment. French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, warned : " You can't do Europe a la carte... to take an example which our British friends will understand - imagine Europe is a football club and you join, once you're in it you can't say ' Let's play rugby'. His German counterpart pronounced that Germany wanted the UK to "

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remain an active and constructive part of the European Union... but cherry picking is not an option” before adding that Europe needed more, not less, integration.

This Prime Minister’s statement occurs while the population is calling into question the influence of the EU. Indeed, a recent poll showed that a majority (50%) of British people would accept the UK’s exit from EU. Only 33% are opposed to that idea when 17% prefer to abstain. According to another poll, a majority of British people agree the Cameron’s decision of referendum. However, some political specialists see the referendum decision as a political move against the UK independence party, which is a euro-sceptic populist political party. This nationalist referendum could discontinue the increasing popularity of the Conservatives’ adversary.

The consequences of such a withdrawal would be dire

Exports

The European Union is easily Britain’s biggest single export market, with 53 per cent of goods purchased by European nations in 2011. This sector of British economy, directly and indirectly, supports three million jobs. Norway, Iceland and Switzerland already sell goods through a free-trade agreement. The difference would be that the UK would not be able to set the rules that govern the European single market. It would, of course, have to implement those rules to keep selling into those markets though. The argument sometimes deployed by the euroskepticts is that leaving would, somehow, encourage British manufacturers to concentrate on exporting to the likes of China, Brazil and India.

Imports

Britain also imports a great deal from other nations in the EU – more than it exports, in fact. In 2011, they exported £159bn of goods to the EU and imported goods worth £202bn – an annual trade deficit of £42bn. Their European partners argue that the UK needs Europe more than Europe needs them. The problem is that the UK import a lot of European goods, not because they are doing the Europeans a favour, but because people want to buy things that cannot be produced in Britain – think of all those German cars and French luxury goods.

If Britain decided to leave the EU, the Government might decide to impose large tariffs on European imports, but this probably wouldn't prove very popular.

Immigration

If Britain left the EU, the Government would not be required to permit the free movement of all citizens of the 27 nations of the union into Britain, nor their right to work here. About EU 165, 000 citizens migrated to the UK in the year to September 2011, after 182, 000 arrived in the 12 months to September 2010. Immigrants are an economic benefit for Britain, filling holes in the labour market and boosting overall productivity. But the free movement of people is two-way. An estimated 748, 010 Britons live or work in the European Union. Many have holiday homes in France and Spain. If Britain decided to restrict inflows of EU citizens to Britain, the European Union would be likely to respond in kind.

Banking

Britain is fighting a Financial Taxation Tax, which is much of the rest of Europe supports. British bankers, for their part, are generally in favour of staying in the EU. They fear that their access to lucrative European capital markets could be impeded if Britain left the bloc. And both banks and businesses calculate that Britain's EU membership is in their interests because the EU can help to open foreign markets such as China up to them more effectively than the UK acting alone.

Politics

Europe is more social democratic than the UK. They feel Europe is helping to undermine Britain's social and economic freedoms. Yet there are global politics to consider, too. The right wants to rely on Britain's "special relationship" with the US, but Washington prefers Britain to work in closer partnership with the EU. Rising Asian giants such as India and China also seem to regard Britain's membership of the EU as a good reason to build economic and diplomatic ties with us.

Conclusion

To sum up, opinion polls show that most Britons are in favour of leaving the European Union. Britain has long had ambivalent feelings towards the European club it joined in 1973. They were sceptical about big projects like the single currency. At a summit of European leaders on December 8th, David Cameron refused to agree to a fiscal compact designed to safeguard the euro's future. But opponents argue that a medium-sized power like Britain can only exert international influence through the EU.