

# Brexit vote is about the supremacy of Parliament and nothing else

Why I am voting to leave the EU, by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard

At heart, the Brexit vote is about the supremacy of Parliament. All else is noise

With sadness and tortured by doubts, I will cast my vote as an ordinary citizen for withdrawal from the European Union.

Let there be no illusion about the trauma of Brexit. Anybody who claims that Britain can lightly disengage after 43 years enmeshed in EU affairs is a charlatan, or a dreamer, or has little contact with the realities of global finance and geopolitics.

Stripped of distractions, it comes down to an elemental choice: whether to restore the full self-government of this nation, or to continue living under a higher supranational regime, ruled by a European Council that we do not elect in any meaningful sense, and that the British people can never remove, even when it persists in error.

For some of us – and we do not take our cue from the Leave campaign – it has nothing to do with payments into the EU budget. Whatever the sum, it is economically trivial, worth unfettered access to a giant market.

We are deciding whether to be guided by a Commission with quasi-executive powers that operates more like the priesthood of the 13th Century papacy than a modern civil service; and whether to submit to a European Court (ECJ) that claims sweeping supremacy, with no right of appeal.

It is whether you think the nation states of Europe are the

only authentic fora of democracy, be it in this country, or Sweden, or the Netherlands, or France – where Nicholas Sarkozy has launched his presidential bid with an invocation of King Clovis and 1,500 years of Frankish unity.

My Europhile Greek friend Yanis Varoufakis and I both agree on one central point, that today's EU is a deformed halfway house that nobody ever wanted. His solution is a great leap forward towards a United States of Europe with a genuine parliament holding an elected president to account. Though even he doubts his dream. "There is a virtue in heroic failure," he said.

I do not think this is remotely possible, or would be desirable if it were, but it is not on offer anyway. Six years into the eurozone crisis there is no a flicker of fiscal union: no eurobonds, no Hamiltonian redemption fund, no pooling of debt, and no budget transfers. The banking union belies its name. Germany and the creditor states have dug in their heels.

Where we concur is that the EU as constructed is not only corrosive but ultimately dangerous, and that is the phase we have now reached as governing authority of crumbles across Europe.

The Project bleeds the lifeblood of the national institutions, but fails to replace them with anything lovable or legitimate at a European level. It draws away charisma, and destroys it. This is how democracies die.

"They are slowly drained of what makes them democratic, by a gradual process of internal decay and mounting indifference, until one suddenly notices that they have become something different, like the republican constitutions of Athens or Rome or the Italian city-states of the Renaissance," says Lord Sumption of our Supreme Court.

Democracies deny internally by a slow process of constitutional erosion, like the City state of Athens

It is a quarter century since I co-wrote the leader for this newspaper on the Maastricht summit. We warned that Europe's elites were embarking on a reckless experiment, piling Mount Pelion upon Mount Ossa with a vandal's disregard for the cohesion of their ancient polities. We reluctantly supported John Major's strategy of compromise, hoping that later events would "check the extremists and put the EC on a sane and realistic path."

This did not happen, as Europe's Donald Tusk confessed two weeks ago, rebuking the elites for seeking a "utopia without nation states" and over-reaching on every front. "Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that the citizens of Europe do not share our Euro-enthusiasm," he said.

If there were more Tusks at the helm, one might still give the EU Project the benefit of the doubt. Hard experience – and five years at the coal face in Brussels – tells me others would seize triumphantly on a British decision to remain, deeming it submission from fear. They would pocket the vote. Besides, too much has happened that cannot be forgiven.

The EU crossed a fatal line when it smuggled through Lisbon Treaty, by executive cabal, after the text had already been rejected by French and Dutch voters in its earlier guise. It is one thing to advance the Project by stealth and the Monnet method, it is another to call a plebiscite and then to override the outcome.

Need I remind readers that our own government gave a "cast iron guarantee" to hold a referendum, but retreated claiming that Lisbon was tidying up exercise? It was no such thing. As we warned then, it created a European supreme court with jurisdiction over all areas of EU policy, with a legally-binding Charter of Fundamental Rights that opens the door to anything.

Need I add too that Britain's opt-out from the Charter under Protocol 30 – described as “absolutely clear” by Tony Blair on the floor of the Commons – has since been swept aside by the ECJ.

It is heartening that our judges have begun to resist Europe's imperial court, threatening to defy any decision that clashes with the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, or the core texts of our inherited constitution. But this raises as many questions as it answers.

Nobody has ever been held to account for the design faults and hubris of the euro, or for the monetary and fiscal contraction that turned recession into depression, and led to levels of youth unemployment across a large arc of Europe that nobody would have thought possible or tolerable in a modern civilized society. The only people ever blamed are the victims.

There has been no truth and reconciliation commission for the greatest economic crime of modern times. We do not know who exactly was responsible for anything because power was exercised through a shadowy interplay of elites in Berlin, Frankfurt, Brussels, and Paris, and still is. Everything is deniable. All slips through the crack of oversight.

Nor have those in charge learned the lessons of EMU failure. The burden of adjustment still falls on South, without offsetting expansion in the North. It is a formula for deflation and hysteresis. That way lies yet another Lost Decade.

Has there ever been a proper airing of how the elected leaders of Greece and Italy were forced out of power and replaced by EU technocrats, perhaps not by coups d'état in a strict legal sense but certainly by skulduggery? On what authority did the European Central Bank write secret letters to the leaders of Spain and Italy in 2011 ordering detailed changes to labour and social law, and fiscal policy, holding a gun to their head

on bond purchases?

What is so striking about these episodes is not that EU officials took such drastic decisions in the white heat of crisis, but that it was allowed to pass so easily. The EU's missionary press corps turned a blind eye. The European Parliament closed ranks, the reflex of a nomenklatura.

While you could say that the euro is nothing to do with us, it obviously goes to the character of the EU: how it exercises power, and how far it will go *in extremis*.

You can certainly argue from realpolitik that monetary union is so flawed it will lurch from crisis to crisis until it ruptures, in the next global downturn or the one after that, and will therefore compel the European elites to abandon their grand plans, so why not bide our time. But this to rely on conjecture.

You can equally argue that the high watermark of EU integration has passed: the Project is in irreversible decay. We are a long way from the triumphalism of the millennium, when the EU was replicating the structures of the US federal government, with an EU intelligence cell and military staff in Brussels led by nine generals, and plans for a Euro-army of 100,000 troops, 400 aircraft and 100 ships to project global power.

You can argue too that the accession of thirteen new countries since 2004 – mostly from Eastern Europe – has changed the chemistry of the EU beyond recognition, making it ever less plausible to think of a centralized, close-knit, political union. Yet retreat is not the declared position of the Five Presidents' Report, the chief blueprint for where they want the EU Project to go. Far from it.

In any case, even if we do not go forward, we may not go backwards either. By design is almost impossible by to repeal the 170,000 pages of the *Acquis*. Jean Monnet constructed the

EU in such way that conquered ground can never be ceded back, as if were the battleground of Verdun.

We are trapped in a 'bad equilibrium', leaving us in permanent friction with Brussels. It is like walking forever with a stone in your shoe.

But if we opt to leave, let us not delude ourselves. Personally, I think the economics of Brexit are neutral, and possibly a net plus over twenty years if executed with skill. But it is nothing more than an anthropological guess, just as the Treasury is guessing with its cherry-picked variables.

We are compelled to make our choice at a treacherous moment, when our current account deficit has reached 7pc of GDP, the worst in peace-time since records began in 1772 under George III. We require constant inflows of foreign capital to keep the game going, and are therefore vulnerable to a sterling crisis if foreigners lose confidence.

The original article appeared in today's *Daily Telegraph*