

# There is no safety inside the arrogant, imperial, and dangerously unstable EU

By Allister Heath

We may not always like it, but one of the intractable realities of the human condition is that nothing ever stays the same. Families, companies, nations, the English language, our daily lives: they all change, for better or for worse, quickly or slowly, all of the time.

Politics is no different. It is therefore absurd to frame the European referendum as a choice between a terrifying revolution (Leave) and an unthreatening embrace of the status quo (Remain); instead, what we are being asked is to choose between two radical change agendas with complex, unpredictable consequences.

“Brexiters have been confronted with the possible downsides of leaving; now Remainians must address the financial and political risks of staying”

Both come with risks and challenges; both are uncertain and will require adjustments; both will mould our country, our economy and our political institutions into something very different to what they are today. But while the Leave side has relentlessly (and rightly) been grilled about its post-Brexit vision, the Remain camp has been shamefully let off the hook.

It hasn't had to explain how exactly it sees the EU evolving over the next decade or two, and what we would therefore be signing up to. Brexiteers have been confronted with the possible downsides of leaving; now Remainians must address the financial and political risks of staying.

The starting point for any sensible discussion is to acknowledge that the EU is facing an ongoing economic and social crisis, and is desperate to deepen its integration

further. Remain must tell us how this would impact the UK, and why it thinks that we would be better off dealing with the fallout inside, rather than outside, the EU.

What, for example, will happen when the next Eurozone crisis erupts (and no, denying that there will be one isn't good enough)? A new deal appears to have been cobbled together for Greece, but the real worry must be Italy, a country whose economy has not grown at all since 2000, which is crippled by 11.4 per cent unemployment and a massive national debt, and which could bring down the euro.

Would we have to put our hands in our pockets directly when the next crisis erupts, or would the impact merely be indirect, reducing our exports to the region? It may be that the European Central Bank is forced to resort to helicopter money, but there is a very real danger that Germany would refuse to put up with that, destabilising the Continent.

There are thus political risks wherever we look. Will Spain go populist? Will the current riots spiral out of control in France? Austria's economy has been growing yet an extremist, authoritarian candidate grabbed 49.9 per cent of the vote at the presidential elections. What next? What is the chance of Marine Le Pen winning a presidential election in France, if not next year then in six years' time, and waging all-out war on globalisation? What would the impact be on our economy and investments in France? Wouldn't we be safer out?

Eastern Europe has also started to elect unsavoury politicians: it may well be that the immigration crisis will tear the EU apart, especially when the Dublin convention on refugees is replaced by a quota system. Expanding the EU to include additional countries, which is very much Brussels's plan, would exacerbate opposition to the free movement of people.

Given all of this, Remain needs to explain why we wouldn't be better off trying to diversify our economy towards more resilient parts of the world. The share of our exports that goes to the EU has already collapsed from 55 per cent in 1999 to 44 per cent last year – but shouldn't we be trying to reduce this further and faster?

If the eurozone succeeds in harmonising its fiscal policies and becoming more like a single entity, it may succeed in overriding British interests more effectively, which could be another reason for us to leave.

The EU was always intended by its founders to be a process – a mechanism by which formerly independent European countries gradually bind themselves together into an ever-closer union. Crises were seen as useful flashpoints that would trigger a further push to integration, and its central institutions were deliberately designed to seek and accrue power.

When I was growing up in France, it was made consistently clear that the EU was a political project that used economics as a tool of state-building; the single market was created because all countries have a free internal market, not because the EU's founding fathers believed in international free trade. We used to be taught all of this openly and explicitly at school: the EU was the obvious, rational future, the only way war could be avoided and the best way to protect our social models from the ravages of "Anglo-Saxon" markets.

There are therefore two possibilities if we vote to stay: eventual abrupt disintegration, or further EU integration. If the latter, how many more powers will we give up when the next treaty comes along, and how much "progress" will be made in critical areas like a European army, tax harmonisation, and the centralisation of justice and home affairs? Why haven't voters been told ahead of June 23rd?

The biggest, costliest and most immediate change after a Remain vote would be psychological. Forget about all the caveats: an In victory would be hailed as proof that Britain has finally ceased fighting its supposed European destiny. Our bluff would have been called in the most spectacular of fashions: after decades of dragging our feet, of being ungrateful Europeans, of extracting concessions, rebates and opt-outs, of trying to stand up for our interests, we would finally have hoisted the white flag. The idea that we would hold another referendum on the next treaty would simply be laughed out of town.

Voting to Remain would thus be a geopolitical disaster for the

UK, a historic failure. Comfortable, middle-class voters who are considering sticking with the devil they believe they know need to think again. Voting to remain is a far greater leap into the unknown than voting to leave. It's self-evidently normal to be independent and prosperous: just look at America, Australia, Canada or Singapore. But there are no known examples of a previously independent democracy being subsumed into a dysfunctional, economically troubled technocracy and doing well as a result. As mad gambles go, it is hard to think of anything worse.

This article first appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on 2nd June