



European Union: I Love EU

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I come to this debate as a scientist and a philosopher. For me the big picture is essential. Get that right and the rest is clear.

Since classical times there have been two huge revolutions in politics. One was its democratization through printed books and papers. The other is its ongoing globalization through television and the internet.

In classical times, politics was personal. Kings and emperors led the masses from above. In the age of print culture, nation states and democracy led to ideologies and world wars.

Now, in the internet age, a global consensus is emerging that national rivalries based on divisions of language and race are best left behind. We need a shared polity.

The European Union is one result of this new consensus. The EU joins the United States and China in a triad of powers that sets the tone for global politics.

The EU started as a project to overcome national rivalries in Europe. The nations of Europe had fought each other for centuries. Now the EU is admired worldwide as a model for regional order.

The EU is a leading symbol of a more enlightened approach to world affairs. It promotes economic development worldwide and takes a reasoned approach to world problems. It is strong enough to take on big corporations. The EU is a source of legislation for better products and workers' rights, of cooperation in law and policing, and of standards to clean up our environment.

The single market has made us richer. Germany is the strongest national economy in the EU but the UK is second. Transnational cooperation lifts all boats. Together we have real clout in world markets. Germany does three times as much trade with the rest of the world as the UK does, so we can still do better.

In science, the UK and Germany are equal partners and compete for EU funding. The EU supports much of the leading edge research in both countries.

But the EU is a work in progress. Much of its structure and function is still imperfect. There is a lot of work to do before we can stand back and say it is done. For example, the 28 member states speak 23 different languages. English is now the standard language of European governance, but translation still complicates things.

One point is clear. Sovereign nations delegate only part of their sovereignty to the EU. They remain sovereign nations that can resign from the club at any time. The EU is not a federal superstate.

One benefit is also clear. International disagreements that could sour relations are resolved smoothly. The bureaucratic machine that does this provides experts to help with technical legislation that would otherwise overload national parliaments. Our parliamentarians can outsource it and focus on serving their voters.

The UK is strong enough in EU chambers to be on the winning side in most of the arguments that matter to us. Our recently clarified terms of membership give us the best deal possible within the framing principles of the European project.

The EU complements NATO. Ever since 1945, most of Europe has lived in peace. Our membership of NATO commits us to going to war in defence of another nation if necessary. We accept this loss of sovereignty as the price of peace.

Today security covers not only military threats but also threats from cybercrime and terrorists. These threats are global and cannot be defeated by military means alone. Without the EU, the nations of Europe could fall to them like dominoes.

A natural reaction for an island nation like Britain is to close its borders. We could do this now if we wanted to, but we are an open society that derives much of its strength from an open culture.

Brexit would not stop immigration. We have about 5.4 million non-EU citizens living in the UK. These are here whether we stay in or not, and with their diverse cultures they pose a challenge.

As for the EU citizens, 1.1 million of them live in London, which is a global city, and 2.2 million live in the rest of the UK. Conversely, 2.2 million British citizens live and work in other EU countries, free to come and go.

Immigration from the EU is not a problem. The economic benefits far outweigh any risk of terrorist infiltration.

People who dislike the EU often cite the cost of membership. In fact the cost to Britain last year of EU membership was barely 1% of GDP. This is a small price to pay for the economic benefits, which repay our investment many times over.

Our Treasury estimates that the cost of leaving the EU would be £4,300 for every family in the UK.

Economists worldwide, as well as many investors and business leaders, say the economic case for staying in the EU is decisive. The head of the International Monetary Fund, the governor of the Bank of England, the president of the United States, the chancellor of Germany, and a host of others all agree that Britain should stay.

This is not 1940. Our national existence is not at stake. Our neighbours in Europe respect and admire our national identity. We can stay in the club. We can all prosper together in a rapidly globalizing world.

This speech was delivered during a debate on EU membership held in Poole on 19 May 2016.

Andy Ross is currently a Conservative party agent based in Poole. His views here are personal and are not intended to reflect party policy.