

Britain and the European Union: Forty Years of Uncertainty

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Abstract

The United Kingdom is facing a referendum, to occur by the end of 2017, when British citizens will get the opportunity to vote on whether or not the UK should remain a member of the European Union. For Britain, the referendum is a flashback to 1975, when the nation held a similar referendum where voters decided to remain in the European Economic Community. In the four decades since then, however, Britain has continued to be haunted by its ambivalent and awkward relationship with the rest of the European continent. This study explains why Britain has historically occupied the role as being an outsider within Europe and analyzes the events surrounding the 1975 referendum, as well as the future one. In addition, this study predicts the fate of Britain if it does decide to exit the EU, outlining the numerous effects that Britain would experience if it chooses to abandon its EU membership.

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Introduction

On January 23, 2013, British Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech on Britain's relationship with Europe, in reference to an issue the United Kingdom has been grappling with for more than forty years: should Britain leave the European Union (EU)? He boldly stated: "If we left the European Union, it would be a one-way ticket, not a return. So we will have time for a proper, reasoned debate. At the end of that debate you, the British people, will decide."¹ With the country continuing to occupy a role as a quasi-outsider within the rest of Europe, and with increasing feelings of disenchantment with the EU, many people in Britain favor exiting the organization and taking a more isolationist approach to foreign policy and trade.

As part of his political campaign during the 2015 election, Cameron promised a referendum on the issue to take place by the end of 2017, when voters will directly decide the fate of Britain's relationship with Europe. For many, the concept of a direct vote on the matter is a flashback to 1975, when Britain held an identical referendum, asking voters whether or not Britain should remain in the European Economic Community (EEC). Although two-thirds of voters supported Britain's ongoing participation in the EEC, the dissent in Britain has lingered. Forty years later, the uncertainty of Britain's role in Europe remains as politicians still dispute the now infamous in/out question for Britain.

¹ David Cameron, "Britain and Europe," Lecture, January 23, 2013.

Although the wording of the referendum will no doubt echo that of the 1975 proposition, much has changed within Britain and the European community in the past forty years. The circumstances surrounding the two referendums are vastly different, as are the potential consequences for Britain if it chooses to leave the European Union this time. In 1975, Britain had only been a member of the EEC for two years after joining under the leadership of conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath. Wary of Britain's entrance into the organization, the Labour Party promised a referendum when they came to power in 1974, allowing the British people to decide for themselves whether or not they wanted Britain to be a member of the EEC. The referendum was held on June 5 1975, and proved victorious for the conservatives with 67 percent of British voters choosing to remain in the organization.²

Today, however, it tends to be the Labour Party that supports Britain's membership in the EU, while the Conservative Party and the fairly new right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) oppose membership. In addition to changing party lines by the major political parties in Britain, the EU itself has also become a completely different playing field since 1975. It has grown from ten to twenty-eight member states, and has expanded from being an institution for the sake of promoting a common market system, to a much more dynamic organization that exercises authority in many realms of its member states.³ In the past forty years, the EU has changed considerably and has greatly expanded the role that it plays in its member states. Thus, the potential effects of Britain's withdrawal are tremendously more wide-ranging today.

The greatest incentive for Britain to remain in the EU is its current access to the common market. Those in favor of membership argue that without the common market, which allows free trade throughout Europe, Britain's trade will severely suffer, its foreign investors will decrease, and its GDP will fall.⁴ Many Eurosceptics recognize the importance of remaining in the free market, and wish to negotiate a way to exit the EU but still remain in the common market (a system which Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein have, although those nations have never before been full members of the EU). However, the EU is no longer just an economic market, but has expanded its authority over several sectors of its member states. Therefore, exiting the EU threatens to not only disrupt the economy of Britain, but many more factors such as national identity, immigration/emigration, jobs, education, Britain's overall influence, and the Scottish independence movement. Many Britons in favor of withdrawal from the EU wish to increase sovereignty that would allow Britain to make more decisions for itself. However, others feel that exiting the EU may cause more harm than good, and that the benefits of EU membership far outweigh the negative ramifications. While it is difficult to estimate just how severe the effects of British withdrawal would be, it is clear that the effects would be experienced in many different areas of British life and threaten to forever define Britain's place in Europe.

The European Economic Community and the 1975 Referendum

When the European Economic Community was first created, it was a much different organization than the European Union we know today. The EEC was formally

² Matthew Elliot, "Seven Lessons from Britain's 1975 EEC Referendum," *The Telegraph* (2015).

³ Michael Chisholm, *Britain on the Edge of Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 6.

⁴ Hugo Dixon, *The In/Out Question*, (S.I.: Scampstonian, 2014), 17.

established in 1957 by six founder states: France, West Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, and the Netherlands, though the organization and its member countries already had its roots in the European Coal and Steel Company (ECSC). The ECSC was created in 1951 to facilitate an economic market for the production of coal and steel in Europe. The EEC grew largely out of the ECSC, and its primary purpose expanded to create a common market and customs union, in order to form better trade relations among its member states.⁵

In the 1960s, Britain was not trying to find a way out of the European market, but a way to join it. Hopeful to partake in the union, Britain applied unsuccessfully for membership into the EEC twice: once in 1961 and again in 1969, but both times was told “non” by President Charles de Gaulle of France, who used his veto power to prevent Britain’s entrance, denying both applications.⁶ In the 1950s and 60s postwar era, France was flourishing, experiencing somewhat of a French “renaissance” with a high rate of economic growth, much higher than that of Britain. De Gaulle denied Britain’s application to the EEC, declaring “l’Angleterre, ce n’est plus grand chose,” (Britain is not much any more).⁷ Europeans were also wary of the closeness of Anglo-US relations, and feared that by Britain entering the EEC, the United States would come to have influence in European affairs. De Gaulle eventually resigned in 1969, and Britain’s application was finally approved in 1973 and Britain entered the EEC under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. For a decade, Britain had been essentially begging to join the EEC and was unwelcomed by Europe, mostly out of fear within Europe that Britain was not compatible with the union, and would open the door to American influence in European politics.

Britain had not even been a member of the EEC for two years, however, when the country was already contemplating an exit, due to divided feelings toward its membership within the European community. The Labour Party, led by Harold Wilson, ascended to power in October of 1974. Wilson felt that the Conservatives who had negotiated Britain’s entrance into the EEC had done a poor job, resulting in negative stipulations for Britain’s membership. Under particular scrutiny was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which remains one of the most controversial EU policies today. A large percentage of EU funding goes toward the CAP, which subsidizes farmers. Britain has accused the CAP of being a huge financial drain, which has fewer benefits than costs and needlessly raises the price of food.⁸ Moreover, the Labour Party felt that EU membership limited British sovereignty by transferring too much power from Westminster to Brussels. Wilson wished to renegotiate the conditions surrounding Britain’s membership. As part of his Labour Party’s platform in 1974, Wilson promised to attempt renegotiation with the EU and then present the new conditions to the British citizens who would then be able to decide for themselves whether or not they wanted to remain a part of the European community.

After Wilson’s government came to power in 1974, Wilson renegotiated the terms with the EU, resulting in new stipulations, which were passed by the House of Commons and then drafted into a referendum. The referendum, the first in British history, occurred on June 5, 1975, barely two years after Britain originally joined the EEC. With a

⁵ Sam Wilson, “Britain and the EU,” *BBC* (2014).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Kathryn Hadley, “Back when Britain was Banging on Europe’s Door,” *The Guardian* (2012).

⁸ Stephen Wall, *A Stranger in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 73.

65 percent turnout rate, Britain voted two-to-one in favor of remaining in the EEC.⁹ Conservatives tended to vote in favor of remaining in the organization while Wilson's cabinet and the Labour Party proved to be split over the decision. The "Yes Campaign," advocating for remaining a part of the common market, comprised the majority of the Conservative Party including its new leader, Margaret Thatcher. It was supported by some of the Labour Party, including a majority of Wilson's own cabinet, with 148 Labour parliament members voting against their own party's movement. One hundred and thirty-eight Labour parliament members and many from the Labour Party voted in the "No Campaign," which was led by Wilson.¹⁰

Wilson referred to the result of the referendum as a "historic decision" for Britain. Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary at the time claimed: "It puts the uncertainty behind us. It commits Britain to Europe; it commits us to playing an active, constructive, and enthusiastic role in it."¹¹ The general prediction following the referendum was that Britain had earnestly made the decision to remain in Europe, and therefore Britain was now a true part of the continent and a powerful member of the EU, who would integrate into its role and make the EU a better organization. Jenkins could not have been more wrong, however. Forty years later, the uncertainty persists, Britain continues to retain its position as an awkward outsider in Europe, and still, Britain is haunted by the in/out question and a looming referendum.

In or Out?

Throughout modern history, Britain has occupied a role as being an outsider—culturally, geographically, and politically—from the rest of Europe, a semi-detached position that contributes to Britain's political isolation within foreign affairs. Geographically, Britain is physically cut off from the rest of the continent, fueling its sense of isolation. Historically, Britain has been more uninterested in the continent than many of its European neighbors. The early development of English identity was driven by the use of a single language and the establishment of English law—which occurred in Britain centuries earlier than in many other European states. This sense of separate identity only strengthened after Henry VIII's split from the Catholic church and the establishment of a national church.¹² Later on, during the heyday of the British Empire, Britain was generally preoccupied with its colonies and did not see a reason to maintain close ties with its European counterparts.¹³ In addition, the rest of Europe has consistently criticized Britain for its "special relationship" with the United States, suggesting that Britain identifies more with American politics and lifestyle than European. This shifted somewhat after the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, which was an utter humiliation to Britain's power. The event severely decreased Britain's influence in the world and strained Anglo-US relations.¹⁴ It became clear to the world that Britain's long-lived empire was nearing its end. This occurred during the Cold War, and Britain felt a need to join a stable organization during a time of geopolitical chaos. Britain was then more inclined to attempt to mend relations with its European neighbors, although it still did not

⁹ Matthew Elliot, "Seven Lessons from Britain's 1975 EEC Referendum," *The Telegraph* (2015).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "UK Embraces Europe in Referendum," *BBC On This Day* (1975).

¹² Anthony Smith, "Set in the Silver Sea: British National Identity and European Integration," *Nations and Nationalism* (2006).

¹³ Wall, *A Stranger in Europe*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

successfully integrate into European culture; today, Britain retains its position as being an outsider within the continent.

The identity as being a “stranger” in Europe resonates with the British population. In 2014, 58 percent of British people polled claimed that they were “not European.”¹⁵ Although Britain is definitively a country geographically in Europe, more than half Britons do not consider themselves to be truly European. The same sentiments are apparent in British politics as well. Throughout its membership in the EU, Britain has been the country that has opted-out the most number of times from EU policies.¹⁶ It has refused to adopt the Euro as its currency. In addition, it contains a number of trivial differences such as driving on the opposite side of the road, operating under a different time zone than most of Europe, the use of different outlet plugs, and the use of common law rather than civil law. While some of these contrasts are minor, collectively they represent Britain’s distinct identity as being different from the rest of the European continent.

Anti-Europe feelings and ideas are becoming more prominent in British society, largely accelerated by the media and tabloids which are notoriously Eurosceptic in their approach to reporting. News outlets often portray the referendum as a chance for Britain to finally stand up for itself and make an escape from a domineering and suppressive EU.¹⁷ The British tabloids have demonized the EU, accusing it of wanting to suppress British culture. Headlines state dramatic exaggerations such as “Now Europe wants to do away with prawn cocktail chips” (an iconic British snack). In reality, the EU was working on a health measure that would limit the amount of legal artificial sweeteners in food, a level that prawn cocktail chips would not pass. The British media has been known for twisting facts in its headlines, stating that Europe is a threat to Britain, and the EU is an organization that steals power from Westminster and attempts to suppress British culture. In the past forty years, the British, with their distinct identity and politics have sought to protect their culture and therefore have been somewhat unwilling to become a fully integrated European nation. Disenchantment with the EU is fueled further by new issues that have more recently arisen such as autonomy over borders. In the last half-century, Britons have become increasingly more mistrustful of the EU, sentiments which are evident in its politics (due to its high level of opt-outs from EU policies) and encouraged by the media.

A Changing Europe

Since the referendum of 1975, the EU has become a completely different playing field in world affairs. Its membership has gone from ten when Britain joined, to twenty-eight member states today under one common market and one currency for the most part.¹⁸ The Cold War is over, and new states such as China, Brazil, and India have risen and altered the geopolitical landscape of the world. In addition, the purpose of the EU is not only to create a common market under which all member states can operate, as it was when the EEC was first founded. The EU has become an entire politico-economic union comprised of a central bank, the Court of Justice that deals with judiciary measures, and the Common Foreign and Security that deals with defense and external

¹⁵ Luke Stanley, "British Public Declare, "We Are Not Europeans," *Breitbart* (2014).

¹⁶ David Charter, *Au Revoir Europe: What if Britain Left the EU?* (London: Biteback Pub, 2012), 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

¹⁸ Matthew Elliot, "Seven Lessons from Britain’s 1975 EEC Referendum," *The Telegraph* (2015).

affairs.¹⁹ The EU operates much as if it were a single government comprised of all of its member states, and regulates many aspects of its member nations—everything from the environment to consumer rights. The EU has moved toward becoming a much more wide-ranging and political institution, which at times compromises the sovereignty of a member country's internal government.

Forty years after the first nation-wide referendum in Britain, the issue has persisted and talk of a referendum has resurfaced again. Although the two referendums pose nearly an identical question, the events and sentiments surrounding the two referendums are vastly different. The rise of the relatively new United Kingdom Independence Party has furthered desires to exit the EU. Central to the party's manifesto is its Eurosceptic mentality, in which it demonizes Europe and the EU as being robbers of Britain's sovereignty and culture. This right-wing party, headed by Nigel Farage received 12.6 percent of the votes in the 2015 elections, and has gained traction as being a party promoting Britain's independence and isolation from the rest of Europe for the sake of sovereignty reasons.²⁰ In addition to UKIP, many conservatives are supporting the exit from the EU as well. Central to the conservative party's manifesto in 2015 was the promise of the in/out referendum by the end of 2017, although Conservative leader and current Prime Minister David Cameron advocates for staying in the EU. The Labour Party, meanwhile, tends to heavily favor remaining in the organization. These party lines are opposite from the 1975 referendum, when it was the Labour Party advocating for an exit and the Conservative Party wishing to remain.

While some of the positions have changed, several core arguments have stayed the same throughout Britain's ambivalent relationship with Europe. Britain's sovereignty has always been a key issue in the debate; currently, the UK must adhere to numerous EU policies and regulations. Many Britons feel that business and trade is too regulated, and the numerous red tape wastes money, hurting Britain's economy. Exiting the EU would certainly grant Britain greater autonomy over its internal affairs, including business. In 1975, Wilson was concerned with the high membership costs of the EEC, a complaint that persists. Many British officials complain about the billions of pounds being poured into the EU and feel that not enough benefits are received in return. In 2014, Britain, France, and Germany collectively contributed close to 44 percent of the EU budget, although they represent just three out of the twenty-eight members. Britain alone contributes nearly 10 percent.²¹ The UK has increased its spending on the EU in recent years, but EU spending on the UK is relatively small—resulting in a larger net contribution by Britain over the years. The goal of the EU is not to cater to individual countries but to finance projects that make the union more competitive as a whole. The union often pours money into its weaker, less-developed countries to bolster their economies. This practice has increased in the last fifteen years with the addition of several former Soviet states to the EU after the fall of communism; these new nations require a lot of economic assistance in order to develop their economies and democratic governments.²² This means that developed economies such as the UK get less out of the EU budget than their struggling neighbors. Many in Britain feel this to be unfair, suggesting that the costs outweigh the benefits of membership.

¹⁹ Chisholm, *Britain on the Edge of Europe*, 6.

²⁰ Rowena Mason, "Ukip's Nigel Farage Puts EU Referendum Battle before Party," *The Guardian* (2015).

²¹ European Parliament, *EU Budget Explained: Expenditure and Contribution by Member State* (2015).

²² Charter, *Au Revoir Europe*, 85.

However, as many complaints have continued to persist in the last forty years of membership, new issues have emerged as well. As the EU has expanded to regulate many more areas in the lives of its member nations, sovereignty has become an ever-increasing issue as well. The chief complaints over sovereignty come from the fact that the EU has the power to regulate not only Britain's trade and markets, but also everything from the amount of artificial dyes acceptable in its food to how curvy cucumbers can be. As the EU's power continues to expand, many in Britain are feeling the waning power of their own government and wish to see more autonomy returned to Westminster. Another key difference since the 1975 referendum is the changes in the geopolitical landscape of the world. When Britain joined the EEC, Europe was undeniably one of the most powerful groupings of nations in the world and Britain heavily benefitted from trade with the rest of these highly developed nations. However, the world has since then seen the rise of new powers such as India, China, and Brazil—nations which are appealing to Britain in terms of foreign relations and trade.²³ Some Eurosceptics feel that EU membership cuts Britain off from the rest of the world, hindering its opportunity to potentially create strong relations with other world powers such as these. Lastly, issues of immigration and border control have emerged as possibly one of the largest reasons that Eurosceptics advocate for withdrawal. The EU provides freedom of movement, meaning that a citizen of any EU country has the freedom to live and work in any other EU country without the need of a visa permit.²⁴ With the current immigration crisis, many in Britain, especially conservatives and members of the UKIP political parties, complain about an influx of immigrants seeking residence in Britain and the use of governmental welfare on these immigrants. They would instead favor an end to the EU freedom of movement to allow Britain more autonomy over its borders.

Toward a Second Referendum: Causes and Effects

Citizens of Britain essentially have three options when it comes to the outcome of the future referendum: the country could choose to remain in the EU; Britain could decide to make a complete exit from the EU; or Britain could exit the EU but negotiate favorable terms on which it can still remain a member of the common market without being a member state. Option number two, a full withdrawal for Britain would be economically disastrous for the Gross Domestic Product, as Britain would no longer have access to the common market.²⁵ Options number one and three are therefore the only realistic options for Britain. Most Eurosceptics favor a withdrawal from the EU but to remain a member of the common market, much like Norway, which benefits from the market but has never been a member state. If Britain chooses to maintain membership, it is likely that much will stay the same in British politics. Britain will still have to subvert some of its sovereignty to Brussels, pay dues, and follow the regulations and restrictions of the EU. However, the decision to leave the EU, whether it could still remain a member of the common market or not, holds the power to drastically affect many sectors of British politics and daily life. A British withdrawal would be felt in every aspect from Britain's national identity, trade, markets, and investments, to their world influence,

²³ Katie Allen, Julian Borger, and Arthur Neslen, "Brexit- what would happen if Britain left the EU?," *The Guardian* (2015).

²⁴ Alex Preston, "What would happen if Britain left the EU?," *The Guardian* (2014).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

immigration, jobs, education, and internal affairs such as the Scottish independence movement.

There certainly would be benefits to Britain exiting the EU—Britain's relationship with the EU has indeed worsened in the last forty years with the emergence of new issues facing Europe. An exit would open Britain up to trade and foreign relations with more non-EU countries such as China, India, and Brazil. Britain would gain complete sovereignty over its internal affairs. From border control to business regulation, Britain would be able to create many of its own policies instead of being forced to adhere to numerous EU regulations. Britain would also no longer pay its steep membership fees, where most of the money is funneled into smaller states rather than invested back in the UK. However, with an exit also comes a number of negative effects, and it will be up to the British voters to decide whether or not the benefits of EU membership are worth the costs.

First, a full British withdrawal from the EU holds the power to severely damage Britain's trade, markets, and investments. Exclusion from the common market would make trade from European countries into and out of Britain much more difficult and expensive, as Britain would no longer be under a policy of free trade. As the majority of Britain's trade comes from Europe, this would cause trade to fall and an overall blow to the GDP. Britain needs the common market much more than the common market needs Britain.²⁶ This is why many Eurosceptics advocate leaving the EU upon favorable terms, and retaining membership in at least the Free Trade Agreement, without being a full member of the EU. However, this relationship may not be possible, as an exit from the EU would likely result in some backlash from Europe, making it difficult for Britain to negotiate friendly relations right away. Although Britain would be more available to trade with other nations of the world, it would not be able to trade anywhere as easily or readily as in the EU, so a negative economic impact would still be likely for Britain. Moreover, Britain's exit from the EU would make it a less appealing location for foreign investors. Many investors choose to work in Britain because they then have access to the entire EU, so a British exit would make these investors more likely to relocate to France or Germany. Nestle, Goldman Sachs, Ford, and Hyundai are among a few companies that have already outwardly stated they will look into moving to continental Europe if Britain chooses to leave.²⁷

Jobs in Britain continue to be another key factor dependent on EU membership. Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrat Party and a pro-Europe advocate, claimed that three million jobs in the UK are dependent on EU membership and that an exit would lead to higher levels of unemployment.²⁸ Although some, such as Farage, claim this number to be an exaggeration, there is no doubt that Britain's withdrawal would initially lead to higher levels of unemployment. This would be due to a decrease in trade, foreign investment, and in the GDP, leading to more lay-offs. Although Farage has acknowledged the fact that Britain would experience an initial loss of jobs and capital, he claims that the UK economy is dynamic and would recover.²⁹ Still, this would be a big risk for Britain. Economists agree that the economy and unemployment would experience negative consequences, but it is difficult to predict just how prominent the ramifications

²⁶ Allen, Borger, and Neslen, "Brexit- what would happen if Britain left the EU?"

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Charter, *Au Revoir Europe*, 248.

²⁹ Allen, Borger and Neslen, "Brexit- what would happen if Britain left the EU?"

would be, and just how long it might take Britain to recover, or if Britain even could recover completely.

Britain's exit from the EU would also give the country more autonomy and security over its borders. As the EU currently allows a freedom of movement, this means that any member of the EU can live, work, and study in any of the other twenty-eight member nations without needing a visa. Many Britons complain that too many unskilled immigrants are entering the country, and are hurting the economy and draining UK welfare. The UKIP campaign platform for the 2015 elections stated that an exit would enable Britain to "take back control of our borders," and full authority over who is allowed to work or study in the country.³⁰ However, statistics do not show an unequal amount of immigrants from the EU entering the UK. Currently, 2.3 million residents of Britain come from other EU countries, while 2.2 million Britons are residing in EU countries, a fairly equal balance.³¹ To end freedom of movement throughout the EU would allow Britain to pick and choose whom they want to allow in their country, but it would also negatively affect their own population. British people currently have the luxury of being able to easily visit Europe for vacations, work, study abroad, or retire to the Mediterranean in their old age. If Britain exited the EU and cracked down on immigration, Europe would be free to retaliate and create the same hardships for British citizens to visit continental Europe.

An end to the freedom of movement between Britain and the other EU member states would also negatively affect education. Currently, students from all of the EU nations can easily study abroad or earn a degree from a university in any European country, while paying EU fees, the same as a citizen from that country. If Britain exits the EU, its citizens will have to pay the overseas price to study in another country, which is typically around four times the cost, making it much less feasible for a British student to be able to study elsewhere in Europe.³² It would also be more difficult for European students to come to Britain, and the country will miss out on having those educated and diverse students. Moreover, Britain would suffer from a lack of culture in its society. The exchange of students through study abroad diversifies a university and allows students to gain firsthand experience of cultural differences. This will make British society and education much more homogenous.³³

Britain's exit from the EU would also affect its overall influence in Europe and the rest of the world. Britain currently is one of the big three in Europe and is known for its political power within Europe. This threatens to diminish in the case that Britain exits the EU. Although critics of membership cite Switzerland and Norway as examples of European countries that are not members of the EU but still maintain friendly relations, Britain is a completely different situation. For starters, Britain has considerable more influence than Norway or Switzerland. Its size, imperial history, and great levels of financial clout and influence make Britain's case for exiting the EU different. Also, Norway and Switzerland have never been members of the EU, so they never deliberately exited the community. Britain's choice to exit could result in bruised egos in Brussels and risk of retaliation from an upset European community. If it is not a member of the EU, Britain will no longer get a vote in European politics, therefore it will have no voice or influence within its own continent. If it remains a member of the Free Trade Agreement,

³⁰ Mason, "Ukip's Nigel Farage Puts EU Referendum Battle before Party."

³¹ Dixon, *The In/Out Question*, 3.

³² Charter, *Au Revoir Europe*, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

Britain will still have to adhere to all the EU policies on trade, but this time will have no voice in the decision making, which would not increase sovereignty for Britain when it comes to trade, but actually lower it. Within the rest of the world, it is likely that Britain's overall influence would decline as well. At the moment, Britain's power is intertwined within the power all of Europe—without the combined power, Britain on its own is not substantial. Its population accounts for only 1 percent of the world, and its GDP is less than 3 percent.³⁴ Without the backing of the rest of Europe, Britain on its own is not a powerful nation. It will simply not be feasible for Britain to be a major world superpower as an isolated nation.³⁵

Britain's possible decision to exit the EU could also heighten internal tensions in the UK, particularly for the Scottish independence movement. In 2014, Scotland held its own referendum over whether or not Scotland should remain a part of the United Kingdom. The result was close, with 55 percent voting that Scotland should stay.³⁶ Experts warn, however, that if Britain decides to leave the EU, that could be the final straw for Scotland who would then be more inclined to hold another referendum and this time vote to leave the UK. Britain wants to avoid this; Scotland consists of a considerable amount of land mass and GDP within the UK. Exiting the EU and losing Scotland would divide Britain into a fragmented, weaker version of its former power.³⁷ Not only would the UK lose its relations and connection with Europe, but could also lose a considerable piece of its own country as well, a further disadvantage to the likelihood that the British economy would be able to recover.

Conclusion

The Fate of Britain

Britain's historical relationship with the rest of Europe as being an outsider has shaped its relations with the continent. When the EEC was first created, it was the intention of the founder states to purposely exclude the United Kingdom; France in particular wanted the common market to be a strictly European organization, and generally thought Britain's membership would be unnecessary, while also fearing Britain's close relations with the United States. Once Britain infiltrated the organization, it became an unstable member and almost immediately began to question its own membership and role within the European community. Although Britain has risen to be one of the most prominent members and largest contributors to the EU, the uncertainty and instability surrounding Britain's membership has lingered, even forty years after the first referendum. With new issues emerging such as a changing geopolitical landscape, the immigration crisis, and increasing powers of the EU, the in/out question for Britain has resurfaced on the forefront of British politics, leading to the promise of a second referendum.

The current referendum holds the power to affect a much larger realm of potential consequences than the previous, as the EU has grown in the past four decades to encompass a far greater range of powers in its member states' governments. As the EU has expanded, Britain's influence in the organization has decreased, as has as its own

³⁴ Dixon, *The In/Out Question*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Allen, Borger, and Neslen, "Brexit- what would happen if Britain left the EU?"

³⁷ Dixon, *The In/Out Question*, 32.

sovereignty and powers in Westminster. As many Britons fear this transfer of power to Brussels and a weakening United Kingdom, anti-European sentiments have risen across the nation, particularly evident in the growth of UKIP, an openly eurosceptic political party in Britain. British media tends to be one-sided on the topic of membership in the EU, favoring an exit and British isolation. The media constantly demonizes Europe and the EU as being forces that seek to steal power and money from the British government and destroy British culture. The media reports much less on the positive benefits of EU membership for Britain, most notably access to the common market that supports the British economy, but also membership in the EU gives Britain a substantial amount of clout in Europe and foreign affairs—clout which might otherwise be difficult to come by considering the fact that Britain makes up less than 1 percent of the world’s population.³⁸

With current European issues such as the migrant crisis and the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015, border control will become of immensely greater importance to countries of the western world. Anxiety amongst Britons following the terrorist attack will work in favor for groups such as UKIP and other eurosceptics, who pounced on this opportunity to claim that the attacks in Paris could occur in Britain if Britain does not gain complete sovereignty over its borders. It is likely that more Britons will come to favor an option that would prevent the freedom of movement that exists within the EU, instead favoring that the UK achieves more autonomy and greater control over the security of its own border as a way of combatting threats of terrorism.³⁹ The Paris attacks have revealed a weakness within the EU, which, for many, adds legitimacy to euroscepticism and the case for Britain to exit the EU.

By the end of 2017, Britons will ultimately receive the chance to decide for themselves the fate of the United Kingdom: will it be to remain an ambivalent yet powerful nation in the European community, or to choose a path of independence and isolation? If Britain chooses to remain in the EU, it is likely that much would remain the same for the country; its awkwardness with Europe would ensue, as would annoyances with having to succumb to EU regulations and policies. However, the country would widely benefit from access to the common market and a strong voice in European affairs. Choosing to exit the EU is a far more risky option, which threatens to upset the preexisting order in Britain. An exit would commit Britain to a future independent of Europe with complete sovereignty over its internal affairs, but could lessen the nation’s GDP, decrease the quality of life of its citizens, and give up its influence in Europe. Either option in the upcoming referendum contains both positive and negative potential effects, and one resolution does not exist which would appease all concerns. What can be expected is that no matter the outcome of the 2017 referendum, the dissent and uncertainty within British and European relations, which have festered for almost half a century, will not suddenly cease to exist. The outcome of the referendum holds the power to severely alter Britain’s future in the world, but what it will not solve is Britain’s unique relationship with Europe. Britain’s place in Europe and the EU will likely be disputed in British politics for another forty years, no matter how the British citizens vote in 2017.

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³⁸ Dixon, *The In/Out Question*, 2.

³⁹ Iain Duncan Smith, “Staying in EU Exposes UK To Terror Risk,” *BBC* (2016).

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