

EUROPE IS MORE THAN JUST AN ECONOMIC CONSTRUCT

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The article, "Reform is the key for Britain and Europe, not voting 'in' or 'out'" (Lyons, 2014) that was published in *The Times* is mainly about Europe's economic situation and touches upon the question of whether Britain should stay in the EU or not. It states that when talking about the EU, this means talking about the 18 countries of the eurozone.

Asking the question of whether Britain should stay in or leave the EU is a very complex question and cannot be answered easily. Quoting the *Europe Report*, the article states that Britain should stay in a reformed EU. Furthermore, the article offers solutions on how to reform the EU, still quoting the report. First of all, the relationship between eurozone and non-eurozone needs to be secure and fair. It is also vital to ensure that the single market stays stable. Thirdly, it is important that the EU changes its mindset to a more productive and competitive one. It ends by stating that the EU and London need to work together for a growing economy.

The article focuses mostly on the economic components of the EU. Although this is a very important aspect, the cultural dimension is missing. The European countries have a long history that links them together and this is vital when discussing whether they should stay together as a union or not. Furthermore, the article talks mostly about what the EU can do to keep Britain as a member. And although it is true that the EU needs reforms in order to be more productive and to encourage growth, every member should make an effort to make this work. The citizens of the European countries should feel linked together because of their history and their geographical proximity. They share similar beliefs and goals and this should also get a mention.

What the article is missing are the consequences should Britain decide to leave the EU, economically as well as culturally. Although we all live in different countries, the EU is somehow also a *nation* and everything is interlinked, so that every decision can affect the other members of the EU. The EU is the UK's biggest trading partner and leaving it would not only have negative consequences for the Union, but also for the

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UK. During the discussion, it was mentioned that British businesses do not want to leave the EU, because it would mean that they make less profit. But until now, they have kept quiet about it. Should it come to a referendum, they might make their position clearer.

Positively, the article quotes the *Europe Report*, which offers solutions to the current issues within the EU. And true enough, the EU needs reforms, whether Britain stays in the EU or not. And yes, the countries inside and outside the eurozone need to be treated equally, otherwise it is not fair. Making the EU more productive is also a demand that makes sense and should be a goal in general, not only forming part of the debate about Britain's departure.

During the discussion about this article, it became clear that there is no common understanding of a European sense of belonging. We deeply discussed the position of the United Kingdom in Europe. To us, it seems like the UK neither wants to be in nor outside the EU. They want the full benefits of the membership that comes with being in the Union, but on the other hand do not want to commit fully to it. They are not interested in taking any part in the struggles that the EU is facing. The UK does not really make an effort to make this concept of the EU work – or so it seems to us. We also discussed that whenever anyone is in England for example, we are seen as “European”. This implies that the British people do not consider themselves to be European, which hinders the sense of belonging. The fact that the UK always threatens to leave the EU whenever the discourse does not move in its favour was also discussed. Even though the UK is an important member of the EU, behaviour like this is unacceptable. They already hold back by not having the same currency, which benefits them immensely since their currency is quite strong.

Instead of accepting compromises and looking for what is best for the whole EU, countries always look at themselves first. This is also the case in the local media. Even though it is important for the newsworthiness of national reporting, looking at Europe as a whole is important, too. The national angle somehow prevents the European sense of belonging. Countries need to change their perspective to make the future sustainable. Instead of thinking “what can the EU do for me” countries need to ask “what can I do for the EU”.

Furthermore, we discussed the idea of the European Union. Even though it started as an economic construct, it is now so much more: culturally as well as historically the European countries are connected with each other and therefore need to stick together. In particular, we as Europeans see the open borders as a very positive thing that came with the implementation of the EU. The more we travel, the more European we feel. In order to promote the sense of belonging and to bring Europe closer together, we need to start feeling European. This does not mean that we have to give up our national identity. It means that we look over the border and recognise what is happening there. Taking an interest in foreign events is important in a globalised world and necessary if we want the concept of the European Union to succeed. Without a vision for the future, the sense of belonging to Europe will never be in the minds of its citizens.

Reference

Lyons, Gerard. "Reform is the key for Britain and Europe, not voting 'in' or 'out'". *The Times* (30 August 2014) (online) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/columnists/article4191290.ece>

