

## Is the UK still part of Europe?

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The question brings to light the issue of the actual place of the United Kingdom in the European Union. "Europe" refers here to the European Union.

It is clear that the United Kingdom is a full-fledged member of the European Union since 1972. Note that the phrase "United Kingdom" is conventionally used for international policies, whereas "Great-Britain" refers to domestic policies.

First and foremost, let's start with a **summary of the EU history**. This history starts in **1951** with the Treaty of Paris, where six nations (West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and France), in order to avoid war in Europe, decided to build the ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community. The next step was taken in **1957** with the Treaty of Rome, where the six nations, relying on the ECSC and other transnational organizations created the ECC; the European Economic Community. The UK joined it in 1972. The European Union we know today was born in **1992** the Maastricht Treaty. Today the European Union is composed of twenty-seven members. A twenty-eighth – Croatia - is expected next July.

It is commonly agreed that today the relations between the UK and the EU are difficult, and that's true. It involves two levels:

- A political level
- A symbolical level

### **THE POLITICAL LEVEL**

The reason why the UK joined the EU in 1972 is that the UK aimed at waiting to see if the system worked before joining it. That explains (except that de Gaulle vetoed its entry) why it didn't join the EEC before. The relationship between the UK and the

European Union has always been pragmatic. The UK always considers the pros and cons of any program, and its leaders developed a **wait-and-see attitude**, as proved by their attitude towards Schengen, or the Euro as a single currency.

Reasons for its reluctance.

There are at first some **historical reasons**. The UK is an old nation which has always defined itself in opposition to the continent.

Secondly we may find some **institutional reasons**. There is no written constitution, and the Parliamentary sovereignty (since 1689) is ahead everything. By consequence it looks like difficult for them to accept the European sovereignty above the British one.

At last, we have to consider some **diplomatic reasons**: a tradition of non-intervention in European affairs.

## THE SYMBOLICAL LEVEL

Jacques Delors said that for the British, the **EU was a kind of "unidentified political object" (UPO)**.

The European Union seems like a federal state. Yet, there are in Europe **different interpretations of what a federal state is**. For the UK, federalism means a few states dominated by a super-state. However, for Germany, which is a federal state, it's a decentralized entity which gives more power to regions. It is said in the UK that federalism is the "*f-word*"; it's a taboo.

Reasons for its reluctance

The **British identity**: the Queen, at first, and the Parliament, the Cradle of Democracy. The British Parliament is indeed the oldest Parliament in Europe, it dates back the Middle Age.

Plus, people don't rely on reality but on representations and interpretations of the EU conveyed by the political parties, the press.

***Let's study the role played by the two main parties and the influence of the press.***

## **THE PARTIES**

### *The Conservative party*

It is a right-wing party, which has been dominating politics since World War 2.

During the 1950s, it was called "**the party of Europe**", since it was totally in favor of a more transnational Europe.

But in the late 70s, **Margaret Thatcher**, who led the party from 1975 to 1990, had a vision of an independent Britain. It was known that she didn't like so much Jacques Delors who wanted to create a European social model. For the UK, Delors aimed at creating a socialist entity in Europe.

The conception of Thatcher was that Europe had just to keep the single market and to respect national differences.

For the party, a **turning point was reached with the Maastricht Treaty**, which made euroscepticism grow in the UK. A referendum about the UK's membership is expected, and the result would be that most of the conservatives are against the UK membership.

Today, **David Cameron**, the Prime Minister, is however less eurosceptic than Margaret Thatcher.

### *The Labor Party*

In 1950, this left-wing party defined itself as opposed to Europe, and saw the project of a European Union as an elitist club of rich nations.

Yet, in 1970, the Labour Party was **divided about the question**. In 1975, it organised a referendum with a final result of a majority of "yes" to Europe. In 1990, Tony Blair had a pro Europe vision, unlike Gordon Brown who was reluctant.

Today the party is clearly in favor of the UK membership.

## **THE PRESS**

The press keeps influencing people by giving false representations of Europe. Paradoxically, the press was originally in favor of Europe. Have a look at the special report set up by the European Commission to “debunk” myths and forged allegations about European policies. Most of these rumours have been spread by the press...

### ***To conclude...***

The media give to people a distorted representation of the EU. A majority of UK citizens is consequently against membership. An expected referendum should bring a piece of evidence of it.

**If the UK left the EU** there would be two major possible consequences:

- an increasing isolation of the UK in Europe and a huge loss of influence
- the UK would probably turn towards the Commonwealth countries, especially towards the USA.