

# what future for Europe?

who gets heard? what are the facts? how much is spin? and what are we missing?

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## **dynamics**

There's a lot of referendum talk to take on board before the deadline - but the talk won't stop then. And the consequences are as much for work-life as for any aspect of our shared experience. But a person can get tired of the back-and-forth tussle in defence of economy and the threat of migration. I say that the performance on economy is a pantomime and the tussle on migration a smokescreen.

The complexities of migration can be made to conjure images which divert attention from hidden interest. The perpetrators grab attention by claiming to be heroic defenders of our borders. The hidden issue is about how wheel-and-deal commerce is to be unhampered - liberated from 'red tape'? It's bait-and-switch - damaging the interests that it claims to defend. That damage is to our workers, our women and our poor. And those interests have been well served by the EU.

## **questions**

Some questions are answered with facts, some with opinions and all to target votes. The answers equip the electorate to shape and reshape how things come out. We get the Members of European Parliament that we elect; so it's a matter of trust. We can wonder whether that trust should go to Westminster's winners - but it needn't, it can go to the MEP's we've got... and the one's we can elect? Some politicians see Westminster as the greasy-pole, beckoning the politically ambitious. And it seems that the 'heroic' politicians tried, as MEPs, to get what they wanted from the EU, but failed. There are other future possibilities: Brussels can be a location for reform - flawed but adaptable. Indeed the EU may be the only platform which can support large-scale reform.

And there are bigger questions. They need to deal with climate change, with global conflicts of interest, and with the digital transmission of threats - now and in the future. The increasing economic strength of the eastern hemisphere is a factor - we need to know what is our nation's record in dealing with that leverage. We need also to find the scientific, historical and cultural bases for framing useful answers. Can we believe that all this can depend on the Brits alone, or must it depend on off-shore Britain working with continental Europe? After all, each has been the making of the other.

## **processes**

This kind of complexity does not easily feed into any fact-opinion-vote conversation. Television is good at highlighting juicy drama and soap-opera, both of them loaded with 'he-said-but-she-did-and-they-do clutter. Newspapers must look good to their subscribers and sometimes to their owners. Expert think-tank's science discovers enough to confuse; it being full of probabilities, contingencies and hypothesis - hard to hold in sustained concentration. Some politicians make that tough job tougher by accusing experts of being agents of an aloof élite. And, on the fringes of all this, there is a politics which can't buy attention, and only gets noticed when there is an argument, a contradiction, a drama - or a tragedy.

We can't know what it's like to quit the EU - nobody's done it. But there is living memory of what it's like to be excluded. The 1970s saw the UK as the 'sick man of Europe'. Actually we were good at invention and design; but much was lost by poor external marketing, weak infrastructural investment and bad work-life relationships. Ironically an earlier UK government had designed a post-war German system for the joint management of production; and it has worn well. And it's true that some brits flourished - a smirking self-congratulation claimed 'the harder I work the luckier I get'. But luck was not like that for a marginalised, neglected and angry workforce. Only their neighbours and their trade unions understood how hard work guarantees nothing. So what brits designed for themselves was a disjointed management of divided system; and their offspring are still around. And trade unions are still said to be the causes of failure. It was entry into the European Economic Community that moved things forward, by establishing and maintaining working rights, and in ways which need not damage productivity.

### **futures**

In sifting for facts, opinions and votes we're all engaged in figuring who is manoeuvring, what is camouflage, and is there deceit. It clears the decks for finding what facts, opinions and votes are in touch, who is authentic and what must not be neglected. Good thinking, gathered from real-life experience, gets lost in manoeuvring, camouflage and deceit.

It's doubly and trebly hard to know what consequences any of this will bring. But those consequences are less for you and me than they are for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. So the referendum will not end the debate. And, that in mind, there will be consequence which protagonists on all sides are overlooking. Predictions made before the event will, sooner or later, be greeted by observations made after the event - people will see for themselves. Where promises are not realised credibility will be lost.

So, in the UK and in the EU, who will get heard, how much of that will be fact, will anybody be in a position to recognise what is opinion and spin, will electorates notice when significant information is suppressed or distorted, and what will any outfit be in a position usefully to do? And the Future for Europe will continue to change.

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