



# Frexit?



They did it.

On Thursday, June 23rd, a majority of the British electors voted for Brexit, the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU).



## Introduction: a lesson of democracy (Monarchy 1 – Republics 0).

### 1. A smooth election process.

There was a remarkable **voters turnout**, over 73%, compared to 35.4% for the last European elections in 2014.

This poll shows a real democratic **maturity**.

Dismal economic predictions?

The “friendly” pressure from the American big brother?<sup>1</sup>

Fear and finger pointing conveyed by numerous media channels?

Nothing worked. The British people have decided to retake control of their own fate.



### 2. A surge in civic consciousness

Committed to parliamentary democracy, a constituent element of their identity for 3 centuries, the British nation has **rejected the institutional backbone of the EU**.

- A strait jacket that abdicates the role and responsibility of the European Parliament to initiate legislation, which leaves the European Commission, a non-elected body, in charge of it.
- A strait jacket that undermines the usefulness of the national parliaments which spend 75% of their time bringing national legislation into line with decisions taken elsewhere, in Brussels, following the involvement of lobbyists representing the biggest private business interests.
- A strait jacket which unabashedly and consistently disregards popular decisions. A strait jacket that only leaves the public debate with a single option: to accept against all odds.

What follow-up had been given to the 1998 Irish and Danish referendums on the Amsterdam treaty? And what about the 2001 Irish referendum on the Nice treaty? They had to vote again until they voted what was expected of them, that is “yes”. Claiming a more pedagogical approach, the eurocrats were just being complacent and showing their contempt for the intelligence of the voters.

What follow-up action had been taken to deal with the 2005 Dutch and French referendums about the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe? The approval two years later of the Lisbon Treaty.

What follow-up action had been taken to deal with the 2015 Greek referendum? The adoption by force of the European Commission, European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s draft...

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/04/21/barack-obama-s-invite-dans-le-debat-sur-le-brexit\\_4906553\\_3214.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/04/21/barack-obama-s-invite-dans-le-debat-sur-le-brexit_4906553_3214.html)



## I – A landmark decision



On Friday, June 24th, the news of the British referendum results, countering some kind of world order, suddenly opened up new possibilities.

On Friday, June 24th 2016, all the strong advocates of democracy felt a little bit British, just like socially progressive people felt a little bit French on May 29th 2005.



### 1. The “Special Relationship”?

**The UK wasn't part of the Economic and Monetary Union (also known as the “Euro zone”) or the Schengen area either?**

The UK was one of the least integrated countries of the EU, one with strong Atlanticist leanings?

Yes, because of its geographical position and its history, some of the British and continental political and economic elites<sup>2</sup> have worked actively to turn what was left of a European project of an autonomous political agenda into an Atlantic Europe.

It means that the EU is now a geopolitical dwarf compared to the United States, a mere free trade area, and not to its benefit...

Yes. Yes but **it was too much for many Britons.**



### 2. The social contract?

The EU **customs union**, spearhead of globalization (and not its counterbalance), is one of the reasons behind deindustrialization, the Midlands being one obvious example.

The EU Directive on the **posting of workers** leads to unfair competition towards employees of many British municipal services.

**The Court of Justice of the EU** ensures that European law is superior to national law.

In a country that invented eight centuries ago the Magna Carta, that is a limitation of central authority, such situation could not leave indifferent.



Magna Carta



## II – Today, yes.... but tomorrow ?



### 1. Customs consequences?

**Some press clippings warn the public about harmful customs consequences.** Will the UK join Iceland, Norway and Switzerland by joining the European Free Trade Association again and therefore not leaving the European Economic Area as it is shared with the European Union?

Will there be signings of the same type of bilateral agreements as the Swiss-EU one? Or will it trigger a trade war following a reintroduction of customs duties on goods coming from the UK?

**Knowing that the EU is busy negotiating tariff reduction trade agreements**, nothing is less certain.

Anyway, except for a few additional customs paper procedures, there won't be significant changes.



### 2. Institutionnal consequences

**On the other hand, one achievement** (and a shift) : the reversibility of the EU is now a fact.

**Centrifugal and centripetal forces** will not fail to arise and clash. The supporters of neo-liberalism are already in motion<sup>3</sup>.

Without a doubt, the path won't be easy and full of pitfalls. We don't idealize the national level. It was the national elites who chose to let a “superior” neo-liberal level take over the governance of the country.

And we know that among the centrifugal forces are openly reactionary, xenophobic or neo-liberal parties which someday will be able to zealously implement on the national level what is being now implemented on the EU scale.

Clear, strong and coherent **convictions will be needed**, as well as remaining geared to social progress.

<sup>2</sup> As the word “elite” could have a positive connotation (it rhymes with “merit”), we sometimes prefer using parfois “ruling classes”.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/05/19/la-france-promeut-l-arbitrage-prive-du-tafta-au-sein-meme-de-l-europe\\_4921900\\_4355770.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/05/19/la-france-promeut-l-arbitrage-prive-du-tafta-au-sein-meme-de-l-europe_4921900_4355770.html)



## III – Our roadmap



### 1. A democratic line

Democracy is not possible, anymore, in the EU. And it will be even worse in the future with the Transatlantic union with the United States and Canada<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, we need to get out of it. **Restoring national sovereignty** and all its levers (monetary, customs etc.) is a prerequisite. It's a necessary but insufficient precondition to establishing popular sovereignty and therefore real democracy. For this purpose, convening a constituent assembly to re-arm the counter-powers (the judiciary, the associations, the independent press, trade unions etc.) at the national level.



### 3. A protectionist line of solidarity

At EU level, the protection of small companies and the guarantee of an actual physical control of goods was already wishful thinking. It is and will remain impossible with the implementation of the new EU Customs Code<sup>6</sup>.

**Leaving the Customs Union** will enable a progressive government to implement a healthy and progressive protectionism with a human face. A protectionism that would prevent price level differences and contribute to supporting (and maintaining) a healthy, local, useful and socially responsible production.

A protectionism permitting to **prevent** (through prohibitions or price corrections thanks to customs duties and anti-dumping tariffs) **goods produced under unfair conditions** from entering into competition against those produced on sovereign territories.

A protectionism permitting the respect of standards established by the people: environmental, social or health standards.

**A protectionism respecting national sovereignties**, establishing cooperations freely agreed with elected governments. A protectionism that will reopen existing unfair agreements at the expense of the countries of the South, in particular African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, for example today's Cotonou Agreement, that destroy subsistence and local economy, which drift already poor people from their lands (at best...). And the situation will soon be exacerbated by the Economic Partnership Agreements...

A protectionism **which lay claim to the heritage of the Havana Charter of 1948<sup>7</sup>** and its principles : balance of payments, moving towards equitable labour standards, capital controls, prohibition of dumping and promotion of full employment.

<sup>4</sup> See our file *Demain l'Atlantide* (Tomorrow Atlantis), here: <https://solidaires-douanes.org/GMT-TAFTA>

<sup>5</sup> See our press release *Against internal devaluation... Solidarity protectionism!*, here: [www.solidaires-douanes.org/loi-Travail](http://www.solidaires-douanes.org/loi-Travail) .

<sup>6</sup> See our press release *P... d'Europe*, here: [www.solidaires-douanes.org/CDU](http://www.solidaires-douanes.org/CDU)

<sup>7</sup> That is 10 years before Cuban Revolution! Its content is available here: [https://www.wto.org/english/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/havana\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/havana_e.pdf), a presentation here : <https://france.atac.org/archives/spip.php?article6720>

<sup>8</sup> It recalled "the firm commitment of the United States and the EC Member States concerned to the North Atlantic Alliance and to its principles and purposes".

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.20minutes.fr/monde/1787927-20160216-espace-aerien-grec-viole-combat-turcs>



### 2. A progressive line

**Ensuring social rights is impossible in this context<sup>5</sup>** of permanent blackmail in matter of competitiveness and foreign competition.

Just like fiscal and social harmonisation, restrictions on capital movements are forbidden by the EU treaties.

Leaving the EU will enable a progressive government to implement it, to prohibit relocations and the predation on the production equipment.



### 4. A non-violent path

Nowadays, the last EU supporters claim that "EU means peace", that Europe as it is with its founding fathers and institutions have brought peace to the continent. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

**Peace on the continent results from the combination of two cooperations:**

First, a partnership between two countries: involving the leaders of the two West European main powers. They are not anonymous technocrats but the elected representatives of two governments (Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle) that signed the Franco German Treaty of Friendship, also known as the Elysée Treaty.

Then a relationship between two superpowers. It's because the United States and the Soviet Union represented a serious and credible threat to one another from each side of the Iron Curtain through nuclear deterrence that the international situation stabilized. This is called the Cold War.

Nowadays, provided that it once did really exist, **European defence is no more**. And it dates back to the Transatlantic Declaration adopted on November 22nd 1990<sup>8</sup>. It is worth reiterating that the deadly conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union, could not be dealt with by the brand new EU? Therefore, leaving the EU will have to go hand in hand with leaving its current armed wing, NATO, which managed to intervene without the permission of the United Nations and which might not be able to ensure the safety of one of its members<sup>9</sup>...



## 5. An internationalist line

**While the EU used to be so praised by its devotees for reducing racist and xenophobic tensions, it is not the same anymore.** And this is so precisely because those devotees keep promoting “competition”, that is economic and trade war between European countries for competitiveness, to attract investors etc...

We can already notice in public discourse that Greeks are “cheaters”, Italians “thieves”, Portuguese “mentally deficient”, Spaniards “lazy”, French “nostalgic for a bygone era”. This is quite a peculiar way to promote peace within the EU...

**Immigration:** there is also the topic of refugees. Don't we notice a disastrous management of the refugees? Trying to address this issue one way or another, in fact quite badly, with security and military means at the EU borders, with plenty of walls and barbed wire (Ceuta/Melilla, Hungary, Austria, Italy etc...)? It is precisely important to solve this problem, economically and politically, directly in the countries of origin.

Isn't it more human, respectful of other communities and intellectually coherent to address the causes of human misery? To prevent people from having no choice but leaving their loved ones and their home by prohibiting unfair trade through distorted competition and the plunder of their resources?

**Nowadays, what does the EU promote apart from austerity?** Where is the “social Europe”? The one that “protects”?

Europe, the European idea, can't be reduced to the EU. Airbus, Ariane, Erasmus are concrete projects that were initiated outside the EU framework. They were great industrial and cultural successes in matter of international cooperations.

This is probably the path we should go back to.

On the continent, many progressive forces are ready to discuss this topic on and act.

### To conclude?

#### Decolonizing the imaginary

27 years ago, back in 1989<sup>10</sup>, the people of a small Soviet socialist republic, Lithuania, dared the impossible : claiming independence from a worldwide empire.

2 years later in Lithuania, the impossible becomes possible.

As of a week ago, Europe as it is, that is the EU, seemed to be irreversible. This is no longer the case.

Today, globalization seems to be a fatality. It shouldn't be the case anymore. We must deconolize the imaginary.

#### Society doesn't ask for universal free trade<sup>11</sup>.

The French economy is not in favor of complete elimination of customs duties. What its economic players especially ask for is market solvency, which is the guarantee of a steady demand. A demand driven by household consumption and massive public investment in infrastructure...

#### The means are available

Tomorrow, the British government will invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty<sup>12</sup>. This article provides up to a two-year-long period of negotiations, requires previous European Parliament confirmation and the consent of the European Council by a qualified majority.

Tomorrow, a progressive government may have to go through another **legal process**, that is articles 61 and 62 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties<sup>13</sup>, adopted in 1969, to urgently set up the conditions for carrying out a real program of social progress.

**Customs officers only want to be useful** to society. They are currently fighting against the *Projet Stratégique Douanier* (Strategic Customs Project). They are eager to carry out trade and international movements of goods regulation, and to implement a sovereign policy of regulation and open internationalist cooperation.

**Until then, it behoves us to make known, popularize, make enviable therefore possible, a protectionism of solidarity.**

Paris, Thursday, the 30th of June, 2016

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic\\_Way](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Way)

<sup>11</sup> See our press release *Scrutin européen ? Gare aux coquins !*, here: <http://www.solidaires-douanes.org/GMT-TAFTA>

<sup>12</sup> See here for a presentation: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Awithdrawal\\_clause](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Awithdrawal_clause)

The Treaty is available here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_on\\_the\\_Functioning\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_on_the_Functioning_of_the_European_Union)

<sup>13</sup> Available here: [http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1\\_1\\_1969.pdf](http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf)