

country at the same time, identifying as European would add another layer to how people think of themselves.

One of the key instruments of nurturing national identities has been each nation's own education system. The French, the Spanish, the Germans and the Poles all learn in school what it means to be members of their imagined community. They study their national language, history, and learn about their great poets, artists and scientists. For the EU to build its own cultural identity, it will have to construct European educational institutions. This has started already in tertiary education, but needs to extend to the level of elementary and middle schools as well. Every region should have a few European public schools with a nationally inflected but fundamentally European curriculum, where parents can opt to send their children from an early age. The EU also should expand its own media. Newspapers, journals, radio and TV programmes or stations produced in various languages for national audiences but with EU financing and oversight should have a much stronger presence. The EU is already engaging in supporting various cultural and scientific projects. This, however, reaches only a small educated elite. The EU needs to broaden its cultural reach.

At the same time, anyone who wants to save the EU must think creatively about how to make democracy fit a federal Europe. The first step is to decouple EU political institutions from national party politics. As opposed to national parties and governments being represented in EU political bodies, people should be voting directly for European parties and representatives. In elections EU citizens should cast a ballot for both a European party and an individual representing their region, running on a European agenda, as opposed to as delegates of their national parties receiving votes on the basis of popularity of their party's domestic policies. Furthermore, there must also be space for participatory democracy at the European level. Recent technology makes this a realistic possibility.

With Brexit, the EU has arrived at a critical juncture. If it tries to appease the populist nationalists without addressing the fundamental contradiction of globalization and democracy it risks a gradual disintegration of the EU. The alternative is to develop new institutions at the European level that take over gradually the provision of security, foster European culture and identity and build a new autonomous European polity. This may require a step back, creating first an inner circle of core countries, more similar to each other in terms of wealth, values and political intentions.

Brexit: UK as an exception or the banal avant garde of the disintegration of the EU?

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Four months after the drama of the Brexit vote, a deep fog is, once again, isolating the continent from the UK. Britain is in Europe, but is leaving the EU. If 'Brexit means Brexit' the

decisive but vague mantra of new prime Minister Teresa May, nobody seems to have a clue about what happens next. Brexit leaders had no plans. A gambling, shortsighted and elitist Prime Minister has lightly risked the existence of the UK twice: he was lucky on the Scottish referendum, but not on Europe. Brexit is deeply rooted in the contradictions of contemporary western political economies within a globalized economy (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Bermeo and Bartels, 2014; Beramendi *et al.*, 2015), inequalities and finance (Crouch, 2016) and their dangerous political expression. 5

1. The Brexit vote brings evidence of profound inequalities and cleavages

The two camps were neck to neck in opinion polls for 2 years. Despite all the hype about Brexit, the electorate remains seeming steady with the result since more than 90% expressing no regret about the vote and would do the same (<http://whatukthinks.org/eu/brexit-post-referendum-hopes-and-expectations>). The stormy political events post referendum did not change the opinion despite a broad range of political events: Cameron's resignation, the hostile leadership campaign in the Labour Party, the resignation of Nigel Farage from UKIP (his successor only lasted 18 days), the damaging and at time ridiculous campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party from the two Brexit leaders Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, the lack of plan B from the British civil service, the mobilization of the youth, and the 4 million signature against Brexit, or the decline of the British Pound (minus 14% since the referendum against the dollar). 10 15 20

The profound divisions underlined by the Brexit debate are unlikely to disappear. The Brexit vote was first about sovereignty and immigration together with the hostility and failure of the EU. The vote reflected clear dividing line in terms of education, income, age. Goodin and Heath (2016) after referendum report's title says it all 'Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities . . . educational inequality that was the strongest driver. Other things being equal, support for leave was 30 percentage points higher among those with GCSE qualifications or below than it was for people with a degree'.⁵ The focus on immigration and sovereignty was ferociously echoed in the media. It opened the floor for racist comments and behaviours. During the campaign and after the vote, the police reported a rise of violence, attacks, insults, against ethnic minorities and foreigners, epitomized by the assassination of the labour MP Jo Cox, a prominent advocate of the rights of those minorities. On the 27th of August, a Polish worker was killed in Harlow during the attack of a group of Polish men. Those racist attacks have remained at high ebb ever since: the Home Office has recorded an increase of 41% in the number of 'racially or religiously aggravated crimes' in England and Wales after the referendum (2016). 25 30 35

As in other European countries, growing inequalities and poverty have been associated with the crisis of financial capitalism. According to Eurostat, about 123 million people are now at risk of living in poverty in Europe. Since 2009, the number of people living in what Eurostat frames as 'severe material deprivation' (i.e. percentage of people lacking at least 4 of a list of 9 basic items or activities such as a warm home) has risen from 7.5 to 50 million 40

5 For a precise analysis see the results published by the British Election Studies team, <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-resources/brexit-britain-british-election-study-insights-from-the-post-eu-referendum-wave-of-the-bes-internet-panel/#.WAIMyFuDelg>

people. Together with southern Europe and Ireland, the UK had the strongest growth of poor people at around 8% of the population in 2014, which is far less than Greece or Bulgaria but two points higher than Germany or France. The UK has one of the highest levels of income inequality with the EU: according to the OECD, the Gini coefficient 0.358 in 2013, the highest of the EU (except Estonia) compared to less than 0.3 for Germany, France, or Denmark (0.256). Over the past decade, the UK, wage inequality has remarkably grown more than anywhere else (Fernández-Macías and Vacas Soriano, 2015). And despite the relatively low level of unemployment, real wages have fallen more than anywhere except Greece. According to the OECD employment Outlook, real wages (i.e. income from work adjusted for inflation) increased across 29 OECD countries by 6.8% from 2007 to 2015 (14% in Germany, 11% in France). In contrast, they fell by 10.4% in the UK. Meanwhile, prior to the crisis the top 1% gained 15.4% of national wealth compared to only 9% in France or 13% in Germany (France stratégie 2016 based upon the World Wealth and income data base). In other words, a large part of the population has good reason to feel alienated from economic and political elites. As is now well known, the massive gains of the top 1% are closely associated with the financial sector and the City of London. A referendum is always a great opportunity to express opposition to the existing political and social order.

A second point to emphasize is the legacy of Mrs Thatcher. Britain transformed itself by using the strong state to impose market mechanisms, competition and promote what Crouch (2011) called a financial private Keynesianism. This policy approach has led to profound territorial and income inequalities. As New Labour left office in 2009, the UK General government spending was 49.6% of GDP (OECD figures), which is close to the European average. The coalition government and then conservative led by David Cameron has chosen the austerity road and tax cuts to increase the debt and cut public expenditure down to 43.6% of GDP in 2014 and are aiming at 35%. With the exception of Ireland, no other European country has cut expenditure so quickly and with a strong impact on disadvantaged groups. Massive cuts have been implemented in various social services and local services (about half the budget of Liverpool for instance).

2. The EU, the elites and immigration: Britain as a 'banal' EU country

Brexit results have amplified common trends in Europe and may reveal the UK to be an avant garde of what may happen next in Europe.

The campaign was UK centred. The rise of anti-European, anti-metropolitan liberal elites and anti-immigration feelings that have become common in other European countries received little attention before the vote. But the rise of far right racist anti-immigrant parties is a major trend of European politics. In France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Hungary or Nordic countries, classic pro-European centre right and centre left parties are being challenged by extreme right parties (National Front in France, True Fins (now the Finns Party), Alternative Für Deutschland, Austria FDP, The party for Freedom in the Netherlands) populist parties (Five star in Italy, Orban populist right wing FIDESZ in Hungary). Election after election, those parties are gaining ground at the local, regional, EU and national level by attacking immigration, the EU and singing the praise of sovereign nations. A referendum on the EU is the perfect occasion to express those views. Britain's UKIP and radicalized sections of the Conservative party are in tune with the rest of

Europe. If a similar referendum had taken place the same day in the 27 countries of the EU, how many would have given a clear mandate to remain in the EU? Most countries are divided on the European issue in relation to migration.

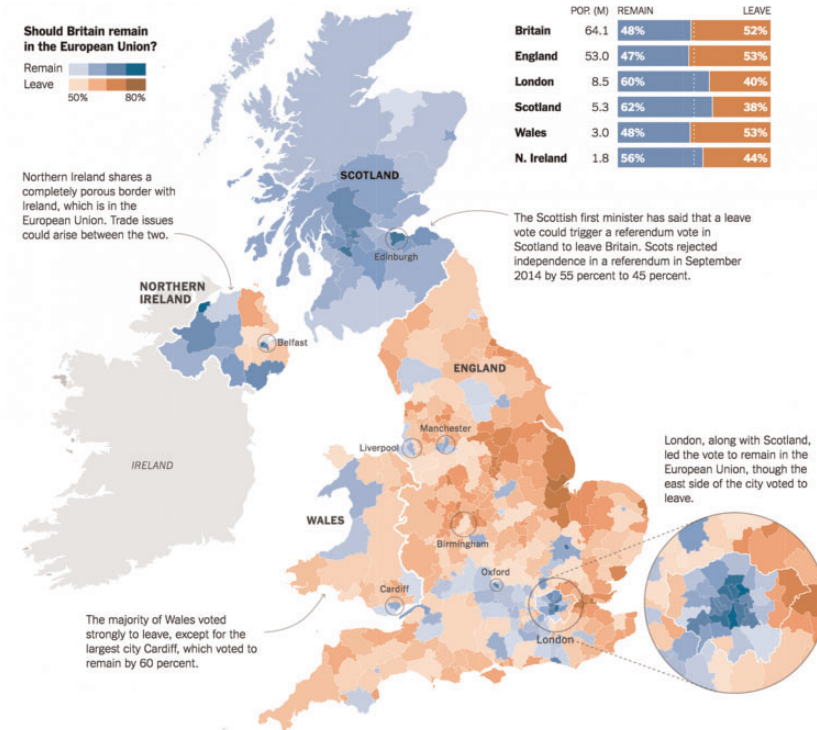
Comparative social scientists have written at length about this increasing divide between those benefitting from Europe, with higher level of education, younger, urban, with liberal values, against those loosing from globalization trends, from the 2008 crisis, from the lack of protection offered by the EU, resenting immigration and the refugee crisis (older, more rural, lower level of education). N. Fligstein's Euroclash, or H. P. Kriesi's projects on democracy and globalization (2008) or the rise of European populism (2015) have analysed those ongoing dynamics. The rise of populism in Europe is a long-term process. Peter Mair (2006) has emphasized the erosion of the representative function of European party systems. Europe has also proved a major driver of liberalization and competition without protections for entire regions and social groups, and a long-term democratic deficit (Höpner, 2015). The economic crisis has accelerated the rise of populism, an element of the crisis of democratic capitalism (Streeck, 2011).

From that point of view, the UK is one European country among others with similar divisions, inequality and mobilization against the elites, the immigrants, and Europe. As in many other European countries, the level of education proved the main predictor of the vote: more educated citizens are inclined to have liberal values, to be at ease with immigration and to support the EU. That also echoes the Tea Party in the USA or the extreme right in Australia.

The UK debate was particularly dominated by the immigration question, which was ultimately even more central the refugee crisis. Since the early 2000, net migration to the UK has been around 200 000 and 350 000 per year (around 300 000 last year). The arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe (between 800 000 and 900 000 Polish citizens live in the UK) has made London in particular a formidable multicultural metropolis, but antagonized many British. The EU has taken the blame for what has been framed as 'a broken immigration system'.

Finally, the Brexit vote has powerfully confirmed the territorial dimension of the transformation of European societies. In most centralized European countries, a gap is growing between those living in the more urbanized, larger metropolis (sometimes regional urban systems in Lombardia or the Netherlands), often the capital and the rest of the country. From Prague to Lisbon or Stockholm, London and Paris, the gap reflects the concentration of the skilled population, the level of inequality, the productivity (as the economy and wealth generation is becoming more urban), the connections to the rest of the world and transnational mobility, the diversity of the population, housing prices, the concentration of elite schools, university, research centres. In the UK, London epitomized those transformations in terms of cultural diversity, labour market, house prices, productivity. London has become a wealth generating centre attracting billionaires from all over the world and massive investment. It is also home to the City is located and the insane bonuses that have been generously distributed to traders and managers. Meanwhile, other regions are in economic and social decline, following the Mezzogiorno road in Italy, large areas Eastern Germany, the north west of France, the northern part of northern countries, the periphery of the Czech Republic or North East England. As territorial inequalities increase, national policy remains oriented towards the new 'national champions' crucial for economic development, e.g. main

metropolis. The UK exemplifies this trend. Consequently, people feel abandoned by the state, the EU and the urban elites.



Source: New York Times, How Britain Voted in the E.U. Referendum

Ironically, only some nations without a state like Scotland have also become staunch EU supporters (but also Catalonia in Spain). Under the leadership of the Scottish Nationalist Party, Scotland is reaffirming its difference from Britain. Scotland voted to remain (62%), and within Scotland, in the capital Edinburgh, 74.4% voted in favour of Remain. In England, the Remain vote won in London by a strong majority of over 60% (except in the poorest peripheries of Greater London East and West), Remain prevailed in Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds, Bristol, Cardiff, and smaller more affluent ones like Exeter, Norwich or Leicester, but not the industrial core of the Midlands like Birmingham. In the home counties, in the north and in the Midlands, the core of England and Wales rejected Europe. This cleavage appears to be more and more territorialized. Middle classes are increasingly urban liberal middle classes. Tellingly, the post Brexit debate has been framed in terms of a revolt against metropolitan elites in London. Continuous gentrification of urban areas has been reflected in sky rocketing property prices, oblivious to wider economic crisis. Property ownership and housing prices have contributed to the creation of these massive inequalities. Class divisions now combine work, property and space.

The day after Brexit, most UK political leaders were speechless, including leading conservative Brexiters. However, both the first ministers of Scotland and Northern Ireland and the

Mayor of London are now exerting serious pressure on the UK government to stay in the EU. To avoid a constitutional crisis, they envisage special workers permits for EU workers and access the Single market for London, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Scotland is already preparing a second independent referendum if a hard Brexit included Scotland. The Irish question is not over either and the remaking of a new frontier between Northern Ireland and Ireland would carry many economic and political risks. Gibraltar is also agitated, but that is less of an issue . . . except for the Spanish. 5

3. Conclusion

In many ways, Britain is an obvious exception in Europe: an island that was not invaded, where Henri the VIIIth rejected Catholicism, where no revolution took place since Cromwell (1640–1660), where peasants were eradicated at an early stage, where industrialization was massive during the 19th century, and the empire dominated the world in the 19th century. More recently, Mrs Thatcher initiated a profound restructuring of state and society (Gamble, 1993). The UK was a late comer and outlier in the EU. Yes Britain is different. But as Timothy Garton Ash (2016) put it ‘being an island makes a difference, but geography is not destiny’. Enough has been said on the peculiarity of the British approach to the EU. Let us just emphasize the lack of understanding of anything remotely associated with the EU in the vast majority of the population (thanks in particular to Murdoch’s popular press) despite holidays in Europe, the openness of the labour market or retirement homes on the Costa Brava. In contrast to the majority of Europeans (first of all the educated ones), the English have not combined their national identity with a local/regional or European one. They do not learn the languages either. According to Eurostat Foreign language learning statistics (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics), with the exception of Greece, the UK as the lowest share of secondary education students learning two or more languages, below 10% and decreasing since 2009. More than on the Continent, part of the population does not consider itself as European at all. The comparative research of Duchesne *et al.* (2013) on attitudes towards Europe was crystal clear: English citizen did not know anything about the EU and were basically more hostile than their Belgian or French counterparts. From Mrs Thatcher to David Cameron, EU bashing has been a normal sport in political debates, probably in more systematic ways than anywhere else and with massive support from the media. The economic crisis, the refugee crisis, pressures on the Euro and immigration, combine to stress the shortcomings of the EU. Why bother with an EU that is economically failing and sending its immigrants to the UK? 10
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Brexit is also one kind of expression of democracy. Many people deeply resented the EU. Despite all the warnings, the optimism of the elites was shocking both at the time of Cameron’s speech about the referendum and until the very last moment. At the end of the day, it was thought that reasonable and rational British men and women would follow their economic interest. The fear of the Brexit chaos put forward at length by the Remain campaign was supposed to suffice even if for years, the same politicians had blamed Europe for everything. They had made a caricature of the EU system. Meanwhile, good reasons existed for some section of the population to vote for Brexit. If the EU and the elites do not protect citizens from the crisis and economic difficulties, why bother? The Brexit vote most importantly underlines income and territorial inequalities, a growing cleavage between globalization winners and losers and a profound Brexistential crisis about the future of the UK. 35
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