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Peter Noordhoek: Set a high standard for the European Parliament

Peter Noordhoek, a member of the Christian Democratic Party in the Netherlands, makes the case for a more positive approach to Brussels.



With much interest I read [the article of Dr Charles Tannock MEP](#) on 'Why we need to take the European Parliament more seriously' and the subsequent comments on it. It led me to write this Dutch perspective on the issue. Not, however, to say anything about the selection of candidates itself. I have neither the position, wish, nor knowledge to do so. It is because I might have something to add when it comes to the importance of the position of an MEP, here, in Holland and elsewhere in Europe. Reading the many comments on the article, and having spent quite a few conversations on this topic with people in your country, I hope my comment will add some fresh insights into the hot debate on Europe in Britain.

And how hot it is. Many people in the Netherlands, including those who are critical of the EU, do not realise how high the temperatures can rise in Britain. The number of people in Holland that are critical of the EU is considerable, enough to vote no on our referendum on the EU-treaty. Even so, most of them would not understand the radicalism with which many Britons approach the subject. For the Dutch, leaving the EU is no option, improving it is a must. For many Britons, including a great many Tories, leaving the EU is a must, improving it an option. Even if I were to agree with that sentiment, which I do not, I do not think it makes sense. For one thing, it may lead to an inaccurate assessment of the importance of your representatives in Europe for your country and party.

To be sure; you are more than entitled to have this critical view on Europe, to plead for a referendum, even to plead for a withdrawal from the EU and to highlight every folly coming from Brussels. It might actually help to bring some democratic sense to Europe's bureaucrats. But please, do not stop thinking about what is in your and our common interest. When a longing for splendid isolation becomes a magnificent folly, it is not only you that will get hurt.

Living in a smaller country than yours makes it perhaps more evident, but it does look like there is a global shift going on that gives Europe more weight. To the business community this is already abundantly clear. Not just because the euro is getting stronger every day in relation to the dollar (and the pound), but it is also worthwhile noting that for instance American companies are now using European standards for their product quality. To the Dutch public this is also becoming clear because the media are slowly but surely breaking their habit of only focussing on The Hague when it comes to political news in the Netherlands. When Brussels sneezes, we know it – and start coughing.

There are many misunderstandings about Brussels. I give you two. The first is that it is mainly a number of European bureaucrats that decide matters. The second is that MEP's are just a silly bunch of impotents

standing miserably on the sideline.

While not diminishing the role of the European bureaucrats, policy is and will be mainly the result of the battles that are being fought out by the national bureaucrats of the now 27 member states. For this, alliances need to be struck, coalitions to be made. Sometimes a single nation can stop a policy, but it is almost impossible to be successful in achieving a certain policy without attracting others to your point of view. You cannot be part of this if your mind is not part of this. The others know. I think the Netherlands paid dearly in terms of influence because of our 'no' at the referendum.

Meanwhile we are all still struggling with the reality of negotiating policies with more than twenty nations. No doubt it will become more a matter of blocks of nations exchanging views than of single nations. Inevitably much of this will be played out in the European Parliament – it is the one public place Europe has. And as this Parliament becomes more and more politicised, party lines will become more and more important. You have to be strong and talented to play in that theatre and very much aware of your position. Saying you do not want to be part of that is like a backbencher saying that he does not care about sitting on the frontbench.

How odd it is then, that while other countries, especially the new ones, do everything they can to be in a good position and send strong candidates, you appear to be less than sure in your efforts. Following the discussion and having spoken with many of you, it is hard to deny a certain – let me say it mildly – ambivalence in the way you speak of the European Parliament and your representatives in it. I fear for the consequences of that.

This issue matters to me both for practical reasons and more. Though we sometimes differ, I think the Dutch and British have much in common, and should team up in Europe, both when it comes to being constructive and being critical of Europe. To me improving the EU is not an option, it is a must and we must do this together.

In politics, you lead by example. In the past year I was asked to do some training on building party organisations and campaigning for young potentials from Eastern Europe. It was wonderful to work with them. What struck me was that they were very much aware and self-critical of the old-style politics in their own countries. They also made clear how much they looked to us, to countries like Britain and Holland, to set a different standard. Being part of a common political effort in the European Parliament, and setting high standards for your representatives in it, is very much part of that standard. Please, raise the bar high in Britain.

February 22, 2008 at 07:17 in [Peter Noordhoek](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments



Sally Roberts zei...

"For the Dutch, leaving the EU is no option, improving it is a must. For many Britons, including a great many Tories, leaving the EU is a must, improving it an option."

Not All Britons, Mr Noordhoek and not all Tories - I am with you on this one! "In Europe But Not Run by Europe".

[Antwoorden](#) [February 22, 2008 at 08:23](#)



Alex Swanson zei...

Mr Noordhoek, it's super to have you write here and I hope this will be followed by many other articles from you and other Europeans.

Unfortunately . . .

You speak about "influence". Our experience is that the British simply have no influence. The only time that we gain anything is when we are aggressive and disagreeable; so why should we not simply adopt that approach all the time? We see that other EU countries do not consider the common good, and certainly not ours; our fishing industry has been destroyed by the EU and no-one cares; and the CAP for example is a disgrace kept in being so that British taxpayers can subsidise French and German farmers, allowing them to unfairly compete against the farmers from the very country that is subsidising them!

I personally, when a teenager in the 1970s, was very pro-EC. I saw that NATO worked and thought that a federal Europe was a natural progression. I still have no objection to that in principle, but I will not tolerate lack of democracy, or hypocrisy from the French in particular. I have been driven to supporting our leaving not through natural inclination but through simple weight of experience.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:27



Common Sense zei...

Thanks Mr Noordhoek. We appreciate you taking the trouble to write to us. Sadly, you appear to have missed the key issue.

The British people prefer to rule themselves rather than have decisions made for them by the EU. Nothing that you or anyone else can say will alter that fact so the sooner you accept it, the better for everyone.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:30



Jason O'Mahony zei...

Speaking from an Irish perspective, I agree with 95% of what Mr Noordhoek writes. Britain and Ireland also share many common values, particularly on free trade and low tax.

Having said that, the constant debate with the UK over membership itself is very tiresome. It is time to face facts: Britain will never convert the EU into a mere common market. The rest of us, including our people, don't want it. Here in Ireland, the NO side of the Lisbon debate complain that the EU is too pro business and doesn't regulate enough.

Britain needs to decide in a referendum not about the treaty but about the EU itself. The whinging has to stop.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:31



Ian Parker zei...

Simple slogans on Europe concern me as they tend to mask reality, either by accident or design. "In Europe but not run by Europe" is, perhaps, the classic example because that state is simply not an option. The fact is that being in Europe, in the sense in which it is currently understood, means that we are increasingly run by Europe. Surely, there can be no real debate about this.

For many, Europe is of course opaque. For those who feel disenfranchised by our own voting system, Europe must seem many times worse. When electing a national parliament, the ambition is clear. Entering the European morass of coalition politics is far more uncertain. The practical gap is between a parliament that is meant to represent our national interests and one which may explicitly represent, even if in a majority way, the interests of others.

So, Europe remains the big elephant in the room. Slogans are all parties like the Tories can offer in an attempt

to present an image of scepticism. The simple truth is that Britain has no more chance of imposing its will on Europe than the Dutch. This is abundantly clear as more powers are transferred away from our national parliament. Since nobody has the courage to pose the single fundamental question that has any relevance to the debate, the only possible outcome is to remain in Europe and (increasingly) run by Europe. That would at least argue for a higher standard of representation in the European parliament.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:33



Tony Makara zei...

EU membership produces more negatives than positives. Things might have been different if the EU had remained the EEC and had been an exclusive club limited in numbers and offering the mutual benefits of trade within a unternal market married with protectionist stance against the wider world. The political superstructure that attached itself to the EEC/EU has served to undermine the sovereignty of all member nations. Now as the EU looks to further enlargement with talks of Israel and other non-European countries joining we have to ask whether the EU is about to collapse under its own weight. The day will come when Britain will have to leave the EU. The original idea of an internal market based on mutual co-operation, one which would help the nations of Europe to live at peace with one another has long gone. That concept is now out of date. The EU is a monster that has grown too big, and a monster that needs to be slayed, in the best interests of Europe.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:35



Ian Parker zei...

Having just seen the other replies, can I add a couple of observations. Common Sense's comment that, "The British people prefer to rule themselves rather than have decisions made for them by the EU" is hardly borne out by the facts. As I said before, if you're in Europe, as we demonstrably are, decisions are made for us by Europe. It's therefore an absurdity to maintain a stance wholly at odds with our actions.

Jason's observations are interesting. Recalling the last referendum on the rejected constitution, countries lined up on the same side to vote 'No' but for totally different reasons, an interesting state of affairs indeed.

As I say, if we are too scared to leave Europe, then we might as well accept it for what it is and, as Jason says, stop whingeing. Clearly, the Tories lack the courage of their implied convictions on Europe. Hence, they will continue to hide behind vacuous slogans.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:43



Letters From A Tory zei...

The abuse of MEP expenses at a cost of £100 million a year is yet another indication to me that the EU is a flawed institution - and anyone who thinks it can 'improve' or 'change for the better' is naive.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:45



Paul Oakley zei...

Thank you for your thoughts Mr Noordhoek. As you rightly point out, enthusiasm for the "withdraw" option is particularly high in this country.

Unfortunately, you repeat the common error that we seek "splendid isolation". This is not at all correct. We fully intend to carry on trading with our EU friends after the amicable divorce goes through.

Further, once the UK is freed from fortress Europe we will revivify our trading links with the rest of the world, not least the developing nations. The economies of those countries have suffered immeasurably as a consequence of tariffs and the Common Agricultural Policy. Trade, not aid, Mr Noordhoek.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:55



Malcolm Dunn zei...

Thanks for this article. I do think you profoundly misunderstand many Britons feelings about our relationship with the EU.

We have not always been told the truth by our political leaders (both Labour and Conservative) about what this country was signing up to. 'Ever closer union' has never been mentioned here by politicians. We were only sold the economics. Now it has become apparent what membership means in terms of subjects as diverse as Post Office closures to mass immigration into our country and of course the repeated allegations of sleaze, corruption and incompetence that emanates from Brussels it has become clear to me that our relationship with the EU has to change or end.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 09:57



Lindsay Jenkins zei...

Mr Noordhoek, you offer a fascinating perspective on the EU - from a country just across the border from Germany of course. As you write 'For the Dutch, leaving the EU is no option'.

Years ago a concerned fellow citizen of yours drove me from the German border to Amsterdam – it took about two hours. Now he said you can see why leaving the EU cannot be an issue here although many of us quietly would like to do so.

Your country's entanglement with what is now the EU reflects that. There was no appetite in the Netherlands to be a part of Benelux but Germany had stripped you of your interests in SE Asia, of your agricultural exports to Britain, your main market until 1939, indeed of everything that wasn't cabbages and turned your country into a major food supplier to Germany. So you were in a most difficult position. That your economy has recovered so splendidly is down to your own efforts and not your membership of the EU.

Your government has over the years had some 'concerned' Germans influencing it from within such as Alfred Mozer – most unfortunate!

Today it is a tragedy for your country, and for ours, that we are not simply co-operating nation states as Paul Oakley has proposed, but bound together by so-called treaties which give us minimal influence and input into what should be our own affairs.

And to talk of democracy in the European Parliament is of course laughable.

The best option for both our countries is that the UK leaves the EU and that countries around the inner core of the EU like the Netherlands will then have the strength and guts to do likewise.

The other option – to stay inside the EU – means the UK and the Netherlands will cease to exist as countries after Lisbon and be reduced to a collection of regions of a socialist superstate.

The End.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 10:20



Tom zei...

Your suggestion that the only alternative to full membership of the EU is "splendid isolation" shows a profound misunderstanding of the way global politics and economics works. I don't know whether this was a deliberate straw man in your argument or simply a result of thinking from the perspective of a politician based in Brussels, but it is incorrect.

It does not take a crystal ball to see what life would be like outside the EU - after all, more than 90% of the world's population are not EU citizens! It would be a funny kind of isolation to be sharing the experience of the vast majority of humanity.

Economically, the gates would not shut. We buy far more from European countries than we sell to them, so we would be in a strong bargaining position for trade deals.

At the moment we get untrammelled trade with the 26 EU member states (a good thing), but have no say over our trade with the other 150+ nations of the world. All that is decided for us by the EU Commission, and their decision is more often than not one which involves tariff barriers, blocks to free trade and oppressive restrictions. That is bad for us and bad especially for the developing countries who find themselves paying high taxes to sell their products to EU markets.

It is perfectly feasible that a non-EU Britain could have free trade deals with the USA (they offered this to the EU a couple of years ago but it was turned down) and India. We would be far from economically isolated!

The 21st century is simply not a eurocentric one - it is called the Old World for a reason. Let's look to India, China, South America and the marvellous and vibrant economies and cultures of the Commonwealth for our future, not to an increasingly oppressive EU.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 10:20



James Lees zei...

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us. I agree with you that there is a large body of opinion in Britain that would wish to leave the EU. I would also agree with you that reform would be a better alternative. However many British people have come to the conclusion that leaving the EU is regrettably inevitable because of the direction the EU is going in and the belief (whether true or not) that Britain can never break the Franco - German axis.

If you wish to reform the EU and keep Britain in it, I would suggest that your party should leave the EPP and join the Conservatives. You would be surprised how grateful the Conservative Party was and how it might create some positive views on the EU in the UK. Unfortunately it will not happen as you are all scared of the German CDU.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 10:48



Tim Worstall zei...

"Living in a smaller country than yours makes it perhaps more evident, but it does look like there is a global shift going on that gives Europe more weight. To the business community this is already abundantly clear. Not just because the euro is getting stronger every day in relation to the dollar (and the pound),"

Good Lord. Puts everything else the man says into perspective, doesn't it? A rising euro is of course a disaster

for business as it raises their costs relative to imports. Someone who doesn't know this....we're supposed to take them seriously on any other subject?

A positive approach to Brussels is to raze the buildings to the ground, plough the land with salt and sell the population into bondage. Anything else is simply not being either serious or positive.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 11:19



powellite zei...

Mr Noordhoek

Thanks for your article, but it doesn't address the fundamental issue which the EU has to face up - the fact that it is inherently and dangerously undemocratic.

No-one in Britain was given the chance to say whether they wanted to join the EU. The 1975 referendum was presented in economic terms, not political, and subsequently no-one in this country has been given a say on what comes out of the EU, or eve whether we should continue as members.

No-one choses the members of the Commission, no-one has a say on the legislation that is produced. As soon as any criticism of this is raised, they are denounced as crackpots.

The fundamental point is this - why is the EU so scared of listening to the people whom it purports to represent? Why aren't we allowed to make our views known on the CAP, on the CFP, and the other breathtaking examples of incompetence, greed and selfishness perpetrated in our name?

It's because of this issue that many people in Britain would rather be out of the EU, than in it. Or at least given the opportunity to make a choice.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 11:59



David zei...

Democracy for me requires that we can periodically chuck out those making a mess of things and give others a chance of doing a better job.

That version of democracy does not apply when you you have transferred power to the EU.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 12:32



Andrew Spencer zei...

Mr Noordhoek,

thank you for your article. The two misunderstandings you seek at address are revealing and important, but also symptomatic of why many in the Uk distrust the EU so much.

First, you talk about alliances and coalitions in European decision making and you are of course correct that this is necessary in the modern EU. Traditionally, however, alliances and coalitions were matters for international diplomacy not for domestic matters such as workers rights, health and safety regulations etc. In the view of many in the UK, these should be matters for domestic governments not negotiations between European countries. Hence, if voters don't like certain legislation then they can vote out their government and change the legislation. it is no longer possible to do this in numerous areas of policy.

Secondly, You say that the Netherlands lost influence because of the No vote in 2005. This is a very sad state

of affairs indeed. You imply by this statement that the Dutch people have been punished by other European government for their temerity to oppose parts of the European 'project'. Is that really democratic or the type of Europe you can support?

Thirdly, you talk of the growing strength of the European Parliament, one of the less noticed aspects of the Lisbon Treaty. But while the EP seeks to increase its power, it gives little thought to its democratic legitimacy. MEPs continually vote through the European accounts, even though the auditors have refused to sign them off for 13 years; recent reports suggest that corruption of expenses amongst MEPs is of a scale far worse than anything we have seen here and, far from public naming and shaming wrongdoers as happens in Westminster, the EP is desperate to cover it all in a veil of secrecy; The EP subverts its own rules to suppress dissent among those members who want a referendum on Lisbon. Turnout in EP elections is at a record low, suggesting that the EP is becoming less not more relevant to Europe's peoples.

Most in the UK do not long for Splendid Isolationism. We want to engage with Europe and European markets but on terms that we control. It is a question of sovereignty; an old-fashioned notion maybe but one that still has resonance on this side of the English Channel.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 13:09



Idris Francis zei...

There are only two questions about the EU that should concern Britain (1)Does membership of the EU increase our economic prosperity, now and in the future? (2)If the answer is Yes, is it worth abandoning democracy and the freedom to run our own country to achieve it?

Both answers should be perfectly clear to anyone who has studied these issues at all, let alone for 16 years as I have done: NO and NO.

EU membership has been an economic catastrophe for Britain as a whole - though not of course for the job-worths and freeloaders who have climbed on to the gravy train. Entire industries have been destroyed, the rules of the free market cost 3 to 4 times any supposed benefits, and membership currently costs us £50bn pa to £100bn pa according to the best estimates.

Further, it is getting worse and will continue to do so, not least because of the proven incompetence and intransigence of the - I was about to write "half-wits" but the truth is that most of them would be to go on a 3 year intensive course of study to qualify as half-wits - in charge.

Whether this is also true for Holland I neither know nor, to be frank, care that much. For the time being you are a sovereign country, free to make your own decisions. But not much longer.

As for the second question, the proposition that it can ever be sensible to hand over control of our country irretrievably even to honest, competent people - let alone the rag-bag, crooks, liars, half-wits, scoundrels, has-beens and never-wases of the EU - there can only ever be one answer not only for Britain but for Holland surely too - freedom and democracy are beyond price, and as Benjamin Franklin said "Those who give up freedom for a little temporary security deserve to lose both". And they will.

The fundamental problem is this - When democracy has been abandoned - as it is being abandoned within the EU - what happens when the inevitable crisis comes along AND THERE IS NO LONGER ANY MEANINGFUL WAY FOR PEOPLE TO HAVE THEIR SAY? WHEN THEY CAN NO LONGER VOTE THEIR RULERS OUT OF OFFICE, HOWEVER THINGS GET?

ANSWER - VIOLENCE, CIVIL WAR AND WORSE AS THE PEOPLE TAKE TO THE STREETS TO RECOVER CONTROL. THAT IS WHERE THE EU IS HEADING, AND THAT IS WHY Mr. Noordhoek's views are rubbish from beginning to end. They are, I fear, no different in principle from the views of those who would join the

Mafia or the KKK if they could see profit in it.

DEMOCRACY MATTERS MR NOORDFHOEK, IN THE LONG TERM IT'S ALL THAT MATTERS. ABANDON IT AT YOUR PERIL

I have spent tens of thousands of hours studying these issues since I woke up, when told at the time of Maastricht that I would NOT BE ALLOWED to work more than 48 hours a week and realised that these people are clinically insane. The more I know the worse it gets - but the good news is that the British people are at last waking up (and as always, almost too late) and there is no longer any doubt that we WILL leave the EU.

Best of luck in your sinking ship - I hope you have the sense to strike out for shore before it founders or blows up.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 13:17](#)



Dominic zei...

Ireland will by law be having a referendum on the Constitution renamed the Treaty. It has been quoted in many publications Irish opposition leader Enda Kenny has called on Prime Minister Bertie Ahern to set a date for the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. The Irish Supreme Court ruled in 1987 that any major change to EU treaties required an amendment to the Irish constitution. As any amendments to the Irish constitution require referenda, the ruling mandated that any new EU treaty also requires a referendum.

All eyes will be on this vote but it will have little effect on the outcome as Britain's position seems set for further integration and more red tape and a constant churning out of stupid directives.

1. A press release from Open Europe confirms many comments on this blog A blank cheque: leaked EU document reveals Government doesn't even know what it is signing up to in the Lisbon Treaty
28 January 2008

Open Europe released a confidential strategy paper prepared by the Slovenian EU Presidency for heads of Governments which identifies 31 areas of the Lisbon Treaty where decisions have not yet been taken on how the arrangements will actually work in practice.

The leaked document provides a list of decisions that will need to be taken and "preparatory work" which will need to be carried out during the course of 2008 - before the Treaty is even ratified in all member states.

In particular, the document shows that EU leaders plan to make a series of important decisions only after ratification in "difficult" countries such as the UK. Many decisions are to be taken "as soon as possible" after ratification is out of the way. So MPs will effectively be signing a blank cheque if they vote for the Treaty without a referendum.

Open Europe Director Neil O'Brien said:

"Much of the Lisbon Treaty is about giving the EU the power to create new institutions and arrangements and to decide on how they will actually work in practice at a later date. Many of these crucial decisions will be made by majority voting - so the UK is unlikely to be able to stop any details it doesn't like the look of."

"Once the Treaty is ratified, there'll be no going back. There are so many deliberately unanswered questions in there - about things as important as the role and powers of the EU President and Foreign Minister - that MPs would effectively be signing a blank cheque to the EU if they ratify this Treaty without a referendum."

See link below to read the paper (partially in French):

<http://openeurope.org.uk/research/sloveniannote.pdf>

See link below to read a translation of the French parts:

<http://www.openeurope.org.uk/research/presidencynotetranslation.pdf>

Issues which remain to be resolved include:

Institutions

The role of the EU President. The exact role of the President remains to be defined. For example, will he represent the EU abroad, and, if so, what will be the role of the Foreign Minister? How will the President interact with the rotating presidencies of the Council? Will he have the entire body of civil servants at the Council Secretariat (6,000 in total) at his disposal?

The EU President and Foreign Minister's "conditions of employment" - this includes pay, benefits, pensions etc. To put this into context, the EU President is likely to be better paid than the Commission President, who is paid £180,000 a year, on which he pays a special EU rate of tax of just 15 per cent. He can also claim accommodation expenses of £27,000, £7,000 for entertaining, and an official car worth up to £75,000. His pension, which also attracts the low Brussels tax rate, is £120,000 a year.

Home Affairs

The structure, operation and field of action of Europol. The Treaty gives new tasks and powers to Europol in general terms - giving it a role in operational action on the ground (e.g. dawn raids etc) - but how this will work will need to be defined by specific legislation.

The new powers and operation of Eurojust. The Lisbon Treaty gives the European prosecutors' group new powers including the "initiation of investigations". The UK Government initially opposed this, but later gave way. Johannes Thuy, a spokesman for Eurojust, confirmed that "We could compel the British police to make a prosecution." However, exactly how this will work is yet to be decided.

The rules governing the European Public Prosecutor and its functions. The Lisbon Treaty allows for a regulation to be agreed which would establish the EPP and lay down its "general rules". Despite opposing the idea for years, under the Lisbon Treaty the UK would no longer have the right to stop the prosecutor from going ahead.

The powers of the new "Operational Committee on Internal Security." There is an ongoing debate over whether the Committee will be able to propose legislation; whether there will be any parliamentary oversight of its work; and what the goal of "internal security" includes.

Foreign Policy

The "organisation and functioning" of the EU External Action Service (diplomatic service). What the EU diplomatic service will look like and do, its size and composition, are some of the biggest remaining question marks hanging over the Lisbon Treaty. The UK originally opposed the service, saying "We believe that it remains for EU Member States to organise their respective bilateral diplomatic services at the national level." (Denis MacShane, Hansard, 17 June 2002) These decisions will be taken by qualified majority, following a proposal from the new Foreign Minister. Estimates of the size of the diplomatic service vary between 7,000 and 20,000. A report by the European Parliament already warned that it could "take on an uncontrollable life of its own" and become "an independent super administration." Spanish PM Jose Zapatero has said, "We will undoubtedly see European embassies in the world, not ones from each country."

The role and powers of the EU Foreign Minister. Despite the UK's objections, the EU Foreign Minister (now known as the "high representative") will have the automatic right to speak on behalf of member states on the issues where the EU has a position. However, other aspects of the role remain to be decided. According to Valery Giscard d'Estaing this week he or she "will be able to talk about aid and cooperation programmes." According to a report in EUobserver, "If it is decided that common foreign and security policy should influence these areas then it is likely to mean that the commissioners responsible for trade and development will become junior commissioners, answering to the foreign minister." (28 November 2007) France hopes to reach agreement on who will be Foreign Minister during its EU Presidency in the second half of the year.

Defence

The size and arrangements of the new foreign policy fund. The Lisbon Treaty allows for the creation of a "start-up fund" for foreign policy operations. Everything about the fund remains to be decided - including its size and how much member states will pay into it - and the decision will be taken by QMV. During

negotiations on the original EU Constitution the Government demanded that decisions about the fund should be taken by unanimity, but it was overruled.

Structured cooperation in defence. Following ratification of the Treaty, member states that are interested in establishing permanent, structured cooperation in the field of defence may set up a group to do so. A briefing paper by the European Federalists argues that the group is a "significant step towards a single European Army." But how it will work is still very unclear.

Arrangements for the implementation of the Defence "Solidarity Clause." The Lisbon Treaty states that "Should a Member State be the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster, the other Member States shall assist it at the request of its political authorities." The UK Government opposed this, but later gave in. The exact meaning of this is still to be decided, and the decision will be taken by qualified majority vote.

Several EU officials have suggested that these controversial decisions are deliberately being put back until after ratification.

Guenter Burghardt, a former EU ambassador to the US, warned that "we have to make sure that there are no discussions [on foreign policy] taking place in the open air" before the UK parliament has ratified the reform treaty and Ireland has held its treaty referendum. (EUobserver, 29 November 2007)

An unnamed EU ambassador said this week: "The issues of the EU Foreign Minister and the common diplomatic service will be dealt with last, after ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by Britain, because the subject is too explosive." (Libération blog "Coulisses de Bruxelles", 22 January 2008)

This fits a wider pattern of dishonesty in the handling of the issue. As Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker has said: "Of course there will be transfers of sovereignty. But would I be intelligent to draw the attention of public opinion to this fact?" (Telegraph, 3 July 2007)

Most British people would like see Britains money spent in Britain and not hand outs to Countries that will eventually compete against us.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 13:54](#)

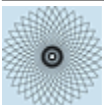


Sally Roberts zei...

Paul Oakley - "We fully intend to carry on trading with our EU friends after the amicable divorce goes through."

At the time of my divorce, back in 1990, a friend of mine who was a lawyer who had practised in the matrimonial field said to me "There is no such thing as an amicable divorce". He was right!

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 15:30](#)



Dave B zei...

"..there is a global shift going on that gives Europe more weight. ... American companies are now using European standards for their product quality. "

This, I must say, is the strongest argument for EU membership being in the UK's national interest that I have seen in some time.

It chimes with an Economist article from 2007, [How the European Union is becoming the world's chief regulator](#).

That said, I'd still like to see a referendum on the EU Constitution/Lisbon Treaty, and an in/out one too.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 15:34](#)



JO zei...

Mere "economics" is not a good enough reason to forfeit one's very sovereignty. Surely, it all comes down to proper accountability of our elected representatives? For there to be effective accountability there must be proper representation and proper representation is conditional on power being contained within Parliament, not being split or shared with those who are NOT accountable to the electorate.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 15:43](#)



Paul Oakley zei...

Hello Sally. Better the short pain of a divorce than the long-term misery of an unhappy marriage.

PS - I take it that we are sworn enemies once more as we are now discussing the EU?

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 16:38](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

Hi Paul,

No don't worry - we are not "sworn enemies" - it is just that we are on a subject that we vehemently disagree about!! I do like to keep it good natured - it is just that some people sadly don't!

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 16:47](#)



JAMES FENTON zei...

Those who preach adherence to and support for the EU project do so out of dogma and/or are paid to do so. They either have been brainwashed by organisations such as Common Purpose or know that what they say is just propaganda and mistruth. If neither description fits they have to be absolute idiots who should not be given any credence whatsoever.

Often to support their position they say things like "look at all the benefits and advantages which we have had since we joined in 1973". And of course we have made advances during the past 35 years. Not everything has been disasterous.

But what they fail to say or realise (depending on the category above to which they belong) is that those benefits have occurred DURING the period of our EEC/EU membership and not BECAUSE of it. That is the fundamental difference. The mega-costly federal "super" state is not needed and it is a totally outdated socialist concept. The USSR had it and it imploded. It cannot last. But until it does collapse that is what we shall have.

Just how many people really understand the ramifications of the Lisbon Treaty ? That as a region of the "United States of Europe" we and our governance will be "controlled" by unelected unaccountable and corrupt bureaucrats over whom we have no control - WE SHALL NEVER AGAIN HAVE MEANINGFUL ELECTIONS.

Even the present structure has that consequence - but when it is coupled with the ability of that self-serving group who swagger around in luxury with unlimited funds and unlimited expense accounts to take whatever further powers and "competencies" it selects it spells the end of this country as a sovereign nation. Already it seems that within a few months the Union Jack will not fly at Downing Street and will be replaced by the EU

flag (yes the same one that was dropped from the 2005 Constitutional Treaty).

Collectively we must be weak-minded to have gone along with it. For that is what as a nation we have permitted successive governments to do. With few honourable exceptions what have our Westminster representatives done to safeguard our interests ? With occasional exceptions what has our media done except for the most part to ignore it or tuck vanilla-flavoured reports away on inside pages ? THE most critical and important thing that has EVER happened to the country. If I had not seen it happen I would never have believed it possible.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 16:49



Paul Oakley zei...

Agree Sally. On top of this we EU-realists are convinced that we will turn people of your view to the Dark Side of the Force eventually.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 16:51



John Leonard zei...

Peter Noordhoek:

I appreciate you mean well, but telling us of your bureaucratic administrative problems is hardly going to impress the likes of myself.

As the Walter Mondale the American politician said many years ago.

'Where's the beef?'

Of course there is none.

It is clear from recent platforms from some of your British counterparts within the EU bureaucracy that you are so institutionally brainwashed that you do not think to mention one real issue affecting Europe. You have clearly become completely detached from the reality of the countries you supposedly represent.

This naive, insubstantive and inconsequential article only strengthens my belief in the utter futility of the EU. You provide no real justification for this extortionate wasteful bureaucratic organisation. It has less benefit than that which could be achieved by sovereign nations co-operating independently.

Whatever argument you make it is impossible for the European Union to provide the level of democratic representation that the British people (or any other democratic electorate for that matter)deserve. It is democratic in name only and always will be.

As a minority in the EU the British will never have the self determination over our domestic issues that is available in a sovereign democratic nation. These things the EU can never provide.

As a democrat and a localist I will never support the EU and have no desire to be represented in an organisation so inherently opposed to my beliefs.

The fact is as an MEP you can never provide the type of political system I aspire to so leave us be and stop interfering in our country!

If you want to start to prove me wrong. Its simple - scrap the Lisbon Treaty.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:07



JAMES FENTON zei...

With reference to the comments which I posted at 16.49 I omitted to say that one (only) of the differences with the Lisbon Treaty compared to those which have preceded it is that there will be the armed Eurogendarmerie para-military forces standing by to enter this country to physically enforce compliance with the overriding EU laws

Just WHAT have "we" got ourselves into ? And WHY ?

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:08



Adam in London zei...

Sigh Another tiresome thread where the EU fanatics rant and rave, foaming at the mouth.

Two points:

1) The Economist article cited by Dave B is an excellent and informative read, that should be seen by everyone on this thread. It highlights the absolute need for us, as one of the most open economies in the world, to keep our seat at the table that decides EU regulations. To do so is vital to British interests. To walk away is to invite 'fax democracy' where we really will be simply informed what the regulations are.

2) Someone tried to make the point that as we buy more from Europe than we sell to it, this would put us in a strong bargaining position for trade deals with the EU once we left. This is a total fallacy. It looks only at absolute volumes of trade and ignores the scale of the economies you're talking about. For example we could, in absolute terms buy more from the EU than we sell to them, but those trade figures could represent 10% of the UK economy but only 1% of the EU economy. Would our position really be that strong?

No, we need to think about what we really want to see achieved.

We ought to like free trade with Europe. We ought to like the Single Market.

We do not like CAP, CFP, the Social Chapter, the Common Foreign & Security Policy, etc..

Therefore, what do we want to achieve? Withdrawal from CFSP and Social Chapter, and at least substantial reform of CAP and CFP (CAP has been reformed a fair bit in recent years) - as it's not realistic to expect French or Spanish agreement, and there are greater gains with losing the Social Chapter anyway. The easiest way is to become 'semi-detached' - John Major's opt-out of the Social Chapter showed us the way.

What might be a way of hurrying this along? Join the EU up with NAFTA to create a North Atlantic Free Trade Area.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:19



JAMES FENTON zei...

The attitude evinced in the comments posted by "Adam in London" at 17.19 are part of the reason why we are in the dreadful mess we are and facing the crisis which we do.

Apathy. "It will not happen in this country". "Is it really that bad ?" A shrug of the shoulders when the bus goes by without stopping and patiently wait in an orderly line in the hope that the next one will be kind enough to stop. Meanwhile the pragmatists and realists act (as often as not by stealth) and are about to take what they want.

The time for that has passed.

Meanwhile we are all set to get the governance which Adam deserves.

What those who really care want to re-achieve is self-determination and self-governance. There is no reason to compromise our own sovereignty.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:38](#)



Young Tyke zei...

What tosh, we want to be out of the EU, not further into it. Sonner we start being British again the better - We are NOT Europeans.

I say that not as an old fuddy-duddy either, i say it as someone in their 20s.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:57](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

"On top of this we EU-realists are convinced that we will turn people of your view to the Dark Side of the Force eventually."

I admire your optimism, Paul!

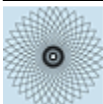
[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 17:58](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

Adam in London - Good natured debate is one thing but to describe those who disagree with your point of view as "foaming at the mouth" is the height of rudeness. I will be charitable and put it down to your extreme emotion on this important subject but let's play nicely from now on; please!

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 18:01](#)



Dave B zei...

"Therefore, what do we want to achieve? Withdrawal from CFSP and Social Chapter, and at least substantial reform of CAP and CFP (CAP has been reformed a fair bit in recent years) - as it's not realistic to expect French or Spanish agreement, and there are greater gains with losing the Social Chapter anyway. The easiest way is to become 'semi-detached' - John Major's opt-out of the Social Chapter showed us the way."

I don't see how the UK can negotiate these exceptions from the EU, so I feel we will ultimately have to leave the EU and rely on WTO membership.

I don't see that as a bad thing for the UK, as I feel the EU attempts to dilute national cohesion, while the UK badly needs to reinforce it.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 18:10](#)



Alex Swanson zei...

"I admire your optimism, Paul!"

Out of curiosity - what would it take?

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 18:42



Bruce zei...

Question 1 for EU believers--has there ever been in modern history an example of a successful country having even two different cultures and languages?

Offhand I can't think of any. Canada is perpetually on the brink of Quebec secession. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia broke up on their own. The old USSR only survived through repression. Any examples I can think of are either countries too small to matter, or countries where the people of the 2nd language/culture are a very small minority.

Which leads to Question 2--if countries with as few as two different languages and cultures can't make a go of it, why should anyone expect a success of the EU, with its many (30?) different nationalities, languages and cultures?

The Austro-Hungarian Empire had a parliament, too. It's ten or so different nationalities couldn't agree on anything, so most of the actual governance was done by unelected bureaucrats appointed by Franz Josef. Isn't this history repeating itself with the EU?

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 19:11



Bruce zei...

The EU Parliament voted on "a simple amendment calling for people to respect the result of the Irish referendum. Looking at the roll call votes for this amendment tells us all we need to know about what British politicians do when they are away in Brussels/Strasbourg thinking that nobody is watching. Worse still is the voting on Amendment 34 which called for a referendum. Guess which party had no votes in favour, yup, the Tories.

-2a. Undertakes to respect the outcome of the referendum in Ireland.

Pretty non controversial you would have thought. After all everybody here in the Parliament reckons themselves democrats. So how can it be that the result of the vote was this...

129 in favour

499 Against

33 Abstentions."

And the vote on having a referendum was even more lopsidedly against.

From the devilskitchen.me.uk blog.

Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 19:19



David Sergeant zei...

Mr Noordhoek thank you for your contribution. I think I should explain to you why so many other contributors seem to be "foaming at the mouth".

Virtually all estimates have demonstrated that Britain has lost out economically in the EU. When we have debated in the UK it is nearly always the pro EU people who have to resort to vague ideas and, just plain, lies. We joined the EU to "influence" it and have found we are the ones being "influenced"

The EU is founded on a waste tip of lies. We are told it has kept the peace in Europe when that was really NATO and the US. We are told it is democratic when daily we see it is not. The people of Europe watch as their leaders cheerfully lie to themselves and everybody else about the Lisbon treaty - the EU constitution!. (This utter travesty is no doubt being watched in Russia and Zimbabwe to name but two.) We watch the vast waste of money and the vast corruption. We see, because of our greater historical involvement with the world outside Europe and our historically different legal systems from the Continent, that all EU acts, with the best will in the world (and that never happens) we have the most to lose and the least to gain.

Just a summary Mr Noordhoek. But think on this; in 1944/45 the Dutch cheered the arrival of the British army. They were cheering the fact that they, and not someone else, would be deciding their government. And you expect people to throw that right away without seeming to "foam at the mouth"?

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 20:08](#)



Paul Oakley zei...

Sally: *I admire your optimism, Paul!*

Not optimism, realism. I too was a Federast 20-odd years ago but learning more about the concept of my affections led to a 180 degree change of mind.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 20:28](#)

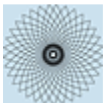


Realcon zei...

As we get near the end-game on the EU take-over, the sickening damage to our country seems to be dawning more strongly than ever on the public.

Time now for this party to change the message from europhile bull (with a bit of sceptic kidology thrown in for effect), and demand powers back from the EU (leading no doubt to withdrawal). Dave are you listening?

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 21:49](#)



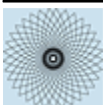
Dave B zei...

"Question 1 for EU believers--has there ever been in modern history an example of a successful country having even two different cultures and languages?"

Switzerland, China, Spain, South Africa, UK.

It's not so unusual. I believe the key is supposed to be having working institutions which the population have faith in.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 22:10](#)



Dave B zei...

"Virtually all estimates have demonstrated that Britain has lost out economically in the EU. "

Are you sure about that? I seem to recall reading that economically it was a 50:50 ball, and that EU membership was essentially a political rather than economic decision.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 22:19](#)



Justin Hinchcliffe - Pro European Conservative zei...

Another excellent article, Mr. Noordhoek - thank you. I hope you will continue to work closely with our MEPs when we eventually, and sadly, leave our friends in the EPP. You are one example why we should stay in the EPP and fight, together, for a better Europe.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 22:52](#)



Bruce zei...

"Dave B.", the examples you give of successful multilingual countries include the dictatorship of China? The dictatorship-to-be of South Africa?

If those countries are "successes", I hope to God the EU never evolves into such a "success"!

BTW, neither Spain nor the UK has a numerically significant 2nd language minority. And Switzerland is among the countries I singled out as "too small to matter" for comparison purposes.

[Antwoorden February 22, 2008 at 23:31](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

"Question 1 for EU believers--has there ever been in modern history an example of a successful country having even two different cultures and languages?"

Belgium (Flemish and French)

Switzerland (French, German, Italian - AND a little-known language called Romansch!)

Ireland (Irish Gaelic and English)

Wales (Welsh and English)

Probably lots more...!!!!

[Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 07:35](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

Bruce you may regard Switzerland as "too small to matter" but isn't that a bit of a "cop out"? After all they ARE very successful for such a small country!

[Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 07:37](#)



Sally Roberts zei...

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland>

And here's a useful link for anyone who wants some more facts on Switzerland!

I think what the debate boils down to in its simplest form is do we want the continuance of a Nation State in

the long-term and is it better for our future?

At the risk of throwing a cordite stick into the mix - but wanting to open up the debate a bit (if the Editor allows?) - I am not sure that the Nation State (certainly in its present concept) is going to survive for much longer. I am proud of my country (Britain) but many things (too long a list to go into) make me sad at what it has become today and increasingly of the view that perhaps it would be SO bad to be a "European"!! I know most of you disagree with me on this and that is fine - but just as with elbow wrestling, we will see which arm is pushed on to the table top first!

Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 08:26



Sally Roberts zei...

"increasingly of the view that perhaps it would be SO bad to be a "European"!!"

WOOPS... There should of course be a NOT inserted between the words "would" and "be"!!!!

Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 08:28



Alex Swanson zei...

Switzerland works at least partly because it is extremely democratic. It's also evolved to it's present situation over hundreds of years.

Neither is true of the EU which is attempting to impose unity through anti-democratic top-down compulsion and deceit.

Incidentally, Sally, you haven't answered my question: is there anything, anything at all, which might cause you to agree that the UK should leave the EU?

Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 14:27



Peter Noordhoek zei...

Coming home from work I was wondering whether anyone would bother to react to my text ...

I should not have worried. In fact, I should have know better. The debate in your country is not just hot - it is blazing hot. Thinking about it, that may be my real point. I love debate, but maybe this one should cool down a little. Enough to see where the common interest lies. Reading the comments I was struck by the fact that most of you did not adress my simple point of raising the bar for your MEPs and in stead got into a deep discussion about the EU itself - inevitably ending with the Second World War.

I wanted to convey to you the different perceptions of the debate and describe the shifts that seem to going on in Europe as a geo-economic entity. You are right to point out that I missed a few important particulars, but it was not my aim to set out my complete view on Europe, just to give you a Dutch perspective on your debate.

As there seemed to be some misunderstanding about it, I must state that am not a professional politician (an avid amateur though), that I do not work in Brussels and I certainly do not have a vested interest in its bureaucracy, as some of you seem to imply.

Almost the reverse. I am an entrepreneur and as such sometimes bothered by European regulation. I am also a citizen of a country that is a net contributor to the EU. As a Dutch taxpayer I guess I am subsidizing you. So if ever you should run into me - buy me a drink.

I guess I feel culturaly and politically more at ease in an Anlo-Saxon setting than in a continental one, which may be one reason why I am writing this for you in stead of for others. I also think Europe should be more

democratic and there is a very long way to go to make it more effective. This by no means implies that I am not in favour of the EU, just to make it more clear that I am not automatically inclined to give you a sermon on the benefits of Europe (the only foam I occasionally have at my mouth is the Heineken-kind).

But it all does not mean that I can refrain from making some critical observations when I think they are in order. That is what you do when you want to be friends. And I do believe you are underestimating your present and real interest in the EU. Even if you were one day to decide to leave the EU - you are in it now and should do what it takes to further your interest. I state that you cannot go it alone - so take a cool look at yourself, your neighbours and your European party.

Thank you for reading my words. Take care.

[Antwoorden February 23, 2008 at 16:57](#)

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