EU referendum: Britain better off in Europe

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Opinion

Britain, with its strong economic reform agenda and international outlook, is crucial to shaping Europe's future competitiveness, argues Alessia Mosca

Britain's eminent prime minister and wartime leader Winston Churchill was one of the first statesmen to call for a 'United States of Europe'. He was convinced that only a united postwar Europe could guarantee peace and freedom. Even today, all these years later it is still hard to contradict Churchill's vision and I believe that a British European Union exit, a so-called Brexit, would only create a lose-lose situation for both the EU and the UK.

A stronger Europe requires a more competitive economy. With the gradual decline of Europe's competitiveness globally, there is an important need for players like Britain, pushing for economic reforms in the EU. And it is critical that a strong economy such as the UK's is, and remains, in the EU.

The single market, to cite just one example, is largely the result of the will of Britain, and could still see further expansion and deepening over the coming years. Additionally, new growth opportunities will emerge such as Europe's digital single market and the energy union. New rules, greater
opportunities and regulations that are more consistent with our objectives could easily be developed if the UK takes part.

Today we are facing unprecedented global competition. We need to understand what is at stake for Europe and then act coherently. Britain therefore plays a fundamental role, as it is perhaps the only truly globalised nation among all the EU's member states. It has incomparable experience in international relations and a wide strategic vision, spanning every geopolitical and economic scenario. Britain also has one of the most cosmopolitan and qualified workforces anywhere in the world.

These are all strengths that are needed in the global and competitive world of today, strengths that are useful in shaping a competitive Europe. Over the next few years we could well see the conclusion to the EU-US transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP) talks. That trade treaty could be a turning point for the EU and US, not only from an economic perspective, but also a strategic one.

US tariff barriers have affected British companies to the tune of £186m last year (€260m), and it is also estimated that non-tariff barriers affect around 75-80 per cent of the operating costs of British companies in the US market. Businesses also reported problems surrounding different labelling standards and measurement criteria. All these things make trade more expensive.

With TTIP, we have the opportunity to set specifications that can serve as global standards. In these negotiations the US and the EU are partners with equal negotiating power. This would not be the case if a country decided to negotiate such an agreement with the US on its own. A TTIP treaty without the United Kingdom would not be impossible - the US and other members of the EU have warned that this may potentially happen. But without Britain, TTIP would be less geopolitically important. It would also be much more difficult for Britain to negotiate such a free trade agreement with the US.

For the UK, TTIP is politically and economically important and it would be more than an inconvenience if Britain was to stay out of it. Additionally, after leaving the EU, the UK would not only face obstacles in accessing the European single market, but would also see itself excluded from all the EU's bilateral trade agreements with third countries.

I believe that the EU performs better with Britain as part of the group and that Britain can really only maintain its international role by staying in the EU.

About the author

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