

## Brexit referendum: Things are far from settled

Written by Richard Corbett on 5 July 2016 in Opinion  
Opinion

The referendum on Britain's EU membership is behind us, but its consequences are far from settled, writes Richard Corbett.



Richard Corbett | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

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[This article originally appeared on Richard Corbett's website.](#) [1]

On the face of it it's clear. The referendum decided that Britain should leave the EU.

And yet, despite this, there have been rallies across the country opposing Brexit, several million people signing a petition to Parliament urging it to vote against triggering article 50 , and the devolved Scottish government hinting it could block the process.

So why is this? There are three reasons:

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The narrowness of the result: 37.4 per cent v 34.7 per cent of the electorate (given that 27.8 per cent didn't vote) is felt by many to be inconclusive. It is, after all, what Leave supporter Nigel Farage himself said would not settle the issue, had it gone the other way.

Leave lies: with more and more people realising that they were taken in by untruths put out by the Leave campaign, the legitimacy of the result is questioned by many.

Remain truths vindicated: the warnings about the risks of leaving, which were vilified as "scaremongering" by Leave campaigners, are proving to be accurate, with an immediate plummet in the value of the pound, Britain's credit rating downgraded, threats to jobs as companies consider relocating, and a fall in economic growth which could turn out to be disastrous.

But beyond these immediate reasons, there are above all growing doubts about what the alternative to membership might be. Two have been contemplated - and they are both problematic.

Some Leave campaigners claimed we could exit the EU but remain in the single European market and continue to enjoy unfettered access for all British goods and services to what is still, by a mile, our vital main export market.

But full access like we have now requires accepting the common rules for the common market, over which we will no longer have a say. It is also likely to require acceptance of free movement - exactly the point that Leave campaigners said was unacceptable.

We'd end up keeping what they consider to be the main disadvantage of membership, while losing our say over single market rules that will affect us anyway.

Other Leave campaigners therefore advocated exiting the single market entirely ("going global"). This is likely to be highly damaging to our economy.

We would face tariffs on exports to Europe and we would need quickly to negotiate new trade agreements across the world to replace those we currently have via the EU, which were secured with the full clout of the world's largest market behind us. No wonder the world is aghast at this prospect.

Before triggering the article 50 divorce negotiations, the government has to plump for one of these two unpalatable options. It has no explicit mandate for either, and so should allow time for a full debate in Parliament and in the country.

But I would not be surprised if that debate gave rise to even more calls from former Leave voters for a rethink. They will rightly say that that is not what they were told. And, even from a eurosceptic perspective, we're better off in than following either of those two paths.

Whether that requires a referendum on the alternative chosen by the government, or on the outcome

of the negotiations, or a repeat of the referendum on membership, or a general election, or a reaffirmation of Britain's traditional parliamentary sovereignty for taking such decisions... this will be the subject of much debate.

But the idea that the recent referendum has settled the issue is surely dead.

## About the author

Richard Corbett (S&D, UK) is a member of Parliament's constitutional affairs committee

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