

# Roundtable: The European Left after Brexit

Barry Colfer, Folke große Deters, Lilia Giugni, Katrine Marçal, Marina Prentoulis, Ania Skrzypek, Renaud Thillaye

*An international discussion of the impact of Brexit and the prospects for the left*

## **From the Editors: the dangers of parochialism**

Like that of Britain as a whole, Labour's debate on Brexit has been strikingly insular. It has not recognised the impact of Brexit on European sister-parties, is not interested in the nature of our neighbours' varying commitments to the European project, and has consequently not even begun to reckon with likely responses to British negotiating positions. As we argued in our previous editorial, this represents a missed opportunity to resist the gathering forces of right-wing nationalism and steal a march on the farcical diplomacy of the Conservatives. *Renewal* has since sought to open a dialogue with younger left thinkers and activists from across the continent, regarding the future of Europe and Britain's place within it. This is very much a work in progress. We would welcome responses from any of our readers who would like to continue the conversation, in these pages or on our blog at [www.renewal.org.uk](http://www.renewal.org.uk).

*James Stafford and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite are co-editors of Renewal.*

## **Other than the UK, Ireland has the most to lose**

*Barry Colfer*

Other than the UK, the country that will be most directly affected by the UK exit from the EU is Ireland. 250,000 UK citizens live in Ireland, second in Europe only to Spain, and 380,000 Irish citizens live in the UK, the number one destination in the EU for Irish citizens. The volume of trade between Ireland and the UK runs at over €1 billion a week, making Ireland the UK's 5th largest market, and the UK exports more to Ireland than it does to China, India and Brazil combined.<sup>1</sup> Up to 6.7 million people in the UK could be entitled to an Irish passport as many in the UK

seek to secure their status as EU citizens, a significant number given Ireland's population of 4.8 million.<sup>2</sup> Given these strong, centuries-old connections between these islands, it is clear that the consequences of 'Brexit' for Ireland are potentially enormous.

Particularly from an Irish perspective, even the term 'Brexit' is itself problematic, as the 'exit' relates to the entire United Kingdom, which includes both Northern Ireland (which voted 56-44 per cent for remain) and Great Britain. The only land border that exists between the UK and another EU country is 500km long, and at its closest point is 95km north of Dublin. Since 1923, a common travel area has facilitated free movement across this border, and on average, more than 20,000 people cross it each day. This unique international arrangement, which pre-dates the Schengen zone by decades, is central to business, tourism, and the social fabric for people on both sides of the frontier. The re-establishment of a hard border would be a backwards step towards the dark days of the Troubles, and could negatively impact the fragile peace-process. What is at stake is the reversal of two decades of careful progress. This situation is further complicated by the recent collapse of the Northern Ireland power-sharing executive, and the calling of fresh elections in March.

Meanwhile, the potential damage posed by the UK-exit is taken seriously by politicians in Ireland, and in 2015, *Taoiseach* (prime minister) Enda Kenny created a government unit dedicated to developing contingency plans for a potential exit. The prospect of Brexit, and its significance for Ireland is also covered extensively in national media. It is easy to understand why. A 2015 study by the Dublin-based Economic and Social Research Institute warned that a UK-exit could reduce bilateral trade between the two countries by 20 per cent, with every 1 per cent drop in UK growth hitting Ireland by 0.3-0.4 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Consequent lower economic growth may have implications for Irish public finances for years to come.

Nonetheless, there are those who welcome the potential positive spillovers of 'Brexit', with the prospect of attracting jobs from the UK, particularly in financial services, given that Ireland will be the only English-speaking country in the EU, and given its young, educated workforce, stable government, and property prices that are far lower than London and many parts of the UK. Given the recent unveiling by Barclays of Dublin as its post-Brexit EU headquarters, such optimism may not be without foundation.<sup>4</sup> As well as this, the *Taoiseach* is now fending off demands for a border poll from nationalists who see Brexit as an opportunity to reunite Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Every major party in the Houses of the *oireachtas* (Irish legislature) is in favour of European integration, and the Irish electorate remains the most pro-European in the EU.<sup>5</sup> While traditional mainstream parties, including the Irish Labour party, are losing ground to alternative parties of the left and Sinn Féin, Ireland is almost unique in Europe in not registering increased support for right-wing populism,

despite the devastating consequences of the economic and social crisis since 2008. This is partly explained by Sinn Féin attracting the disaffected vote, with their message having been described as both ‘populist and leftist’.<sup>6</sup> While remaining steadfastly anti-racist and eschewing anti-immigrant sentiment, Sinn Féin focuses instead on anti-elite, anti-establishment messaging, and support for the party has surged from 7 per cent to 14 per cent, between the 2007 and 2016 general elections. However, even Ireland may not be immune to the rise of grievance-based right-wing populism, given the instability and insecurity that has been created by Brexit.

Unfortunately for the Irish left, there are few positives to be taken from the handling of Brexit by the UK Labour party, particularly the party’s incapacity to put forth a clear vision of what the UK’s future relationship with the EU should look like.

The left in Ireland wants to see strong leadership and opposition from UK Labour in representing the interests of all of Europe’s working people in the ‘Brexit’ negotiations. As the process will ultimately involve representatives of all 28 member state governments and the European institutions, there is clearly an opportunity for UK Labour to take steps to coordinate efforts across the European left to present a clear vision of how European workers and citizens can be best served in the upcoming negotiations. In the absence of leadership from UK Labour on this front however, the politics of ‘Brexit’ in Ireland will mostly likely remain – like most politics in Ireland – local.

**Barry Colfer** is a PhD researcher at the department of Politics and International studies/POLIS at the University of Cambridge. He has previously worked in *Dáil Éireann* (the lower house of the Irish parliament) and in the European Parliament.

## Greece shows no signs of following the British example

*Maria Prentoulis*

There is a small part of the Left in both Greece and Britain that has traditionally held a Eurosceptic position, arguing that the EU enables international capital and hoping that the dissolution of the union will enable working-class emancipation. In Greece this position is primarily held by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and some smaller organizations, some of which were part of the Syriza coalition until the second return of the party to power in September 2015.

One would expect this position to have gained wider popular support after the catastrophic lending agreements imposed on Greece since 2010 and the refusal of EU institutions to abandon divisive neoliberalism. This assumption was falsely communicated in the British media throughout the negotiations between Greece and the Troika in 2015 (negotiations that, in spite of a lack of international media

interest, are still ongoing). In some cases, British observers attempted to 'OXI' vote in the referendum of July 2015 as evidence of Greek Euroscepticism.

In reality, 'OXI' implied only the rejection of the bailout proposals supporting severe austerity and increasing the Greek debt. By extension, it rejected the neoliberal domination within the EU economic and political centres, a domination that failed to offer real solutions to the financial crisis of 2008 or to recognize the structural deficiencies of the Eurozone. British misconceptions regarding Greek 'Euroscepticism', however, also fail to recognize how the idea of 'Europe' (used in many cases interchangeably with the EU) functions within differing national imaginaries and left trajectories.

History and geopolitics go a long way towards explaining the resilience of Greece's attachment to the EU. Due to its strategically significant position, the Greek state has always been subject to the influence of the European powers and the US. It has also faced constant threat from neighbouring Turkey, the enemy which has defined Greek nationalism. The formation of the Greek nation-state, became possible only after Britain, France and Russia intervened in the Greek War of Independence (1821-32), putting an end to four hundred years of Ottoman occupation. Despite subsequent, shameful interventions in favour of the right-wing forces at the end of WWII, the fate of Greece and the fate of Greek democracy have always been associated with Europe; not only by Greek political parties but also by the general public.

Greek identity is defined first and foremost in terms of Greek nationalism (reinforced by claims to the ancient Greek contribution in forging European civilization and democracy) and only secondarily, and with some ambivalence, as 'European'. Ultimately, however, Europe remains for the Greek public the guarantor against Turkish expansive aspirations and some guarantee of democratic stability.

This explains why the position of the KKE and of some small factions of Syriza never gained widespread support in Greece. While the neoliberal logic of the EU institutions is held in contempt, both by Syriza and by public opinion, the political identity of Syriza was never defined by Euroscepticism. Indeed, the main formation within Syriza is the offspring of the Communist Party of Greece Interior, which split from the KKE in 1968, establishing bonds with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and adopting a Eurocommunist outlook. Syriza hoped that after the financial crisis the European conjuncture would change, and that left-wing and progressive parties would come to power across Europe. This would enable the formation of a left block able to challenge neoliberal domination within the EU institutions. This aspiration – to say the least – is a long way from reality. It remains, however, the only plausible course of action for a Greek left constrained by our nation's economic profile, history, position, and identity.

**Marina Prentoulis** is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Politics at the University of East Anglia. A former spokesperson for Syriza London, she is currently engaged with 'Another Europe is Possible'.

## Brexit rubs salt into France's Euro wounds

*Renaud Thillaye*

It should not surprise anyone that Brexit has resonated heavily in France, and is likely to be prominent in the 2017 Presidential campaign. If anything, the referendum's result exacerbated the malaise which has been present in France; not only since the 2005 referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty, but also since the near-rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. With both far-right Le Pen and far-left Mélenchon advocating a form of 'Frexit', a good 40 per cent of the French electorate is expected to choose an anti-EU candidate in the first round of voting in April.

France might be Britain's longstanding rival in Europe, but it is in many respects its twin. A proud nation with a glorious – and imperial – past, its elites and people have always been wary of Europe's encroachment on their sovereignty. Yet while the British dragged their feet into the EU and always remained sceptical about its direction of travel, the French decided to take a gamble. French elites long sought to compensate for the country's loss in power and status by 'uploading' their preferences – e.g. a strong-state and tough regulatory instincts – to the EU level. But the promises of a more protective Europe, indeed of a 'social Europe', have not materialised in the eyes of the public.<sup>7</sup>

The specific reasons for France's anti-EU mood are different from what led to the Leave victory on 23 June. Deflationary Eurozone policies, and (perceived or real) tax or social dumping, are blamed for an economic and social situation that has markedly deteriorated since the *trente glorieuse*. Instead of EU migrant workers, free movement anxieties are related to posted workers, which are three times more numerous in France than in the UK; as well as the porous border of the Schengen free travel zone. Nonetheless, the political conclusions are similar: France has ceded too much power to Brussels. It is striking to hear several presidential candidates, including the conservative François Fillon and socialist Arnaud Montebourg, offering to 'take back control', even if by that they do not necessarily mean leaving the EU.

Only one candidate is rejecting the temptation of EU-bashing: Emmanuel Macron. Like the Liberal Democrats in Britain, the centrist rising star is making unambiguous pleas for the EU and trying to capture the idealism of all those who, on the centre-right and the centre-left, put European stability and solidarity above any other

consideration. This is certainly a smart political move for the first round of voting; but it risks putting him at odds with vast swaths of the electorate.

Unfortunately for the French left, the way in which the British Labour party is handling Brexit offers few positives. What is manifest is the party's incapacity to formulate a clear position on Britain's future relationship with the EU. The political dilemma facing Labour is one facing the whole European left: how can European integration be reconciled with a sense of economic and cultural stability? Jeremy Corbyn has struggled to articulate a coherent and simple message on how much Europe and how much control Britain should have. He might be wary of putting off either of Labour constituencies: educated young city-dwellers on the one hand, and low-earning, less-educated voters on the other. Confusion, however, is never good politics.

To overcome their shared predicament Europe's left parties can learn and draw inspiration from each other. First, Brexit Britain offers a useful counterfactual for the French left. An important lesson is that there is no easy way out. Left Brexiteers (or 'Frexiteers') might hope to see the UK becoming a better place after Brexit, but there is no guarantee of this.

A second, more profound lesson is that left parties should not corner themselves as the last pro-EU force standing. As John Gray recently pointed out, liberalism risks falling victim of its own excesses.<sup>8</sup> Chris Bickerton, likewise, denounces the logic of individual rights which too often takes over from common good considerations in left circles.<sup>9</sup> A major problem facing all pro-Europeans is that EU institutions and fundamental principles are the very embodiment of this liberalism, and are perceived as benefitting the few, not the many.

A firm commitment to European stability and solidarity cannot mean adopting a hands-off approach to the EU any longer. Left parties could usefully work together on what another type of EU, more respectful of national sovereignty and political preferences, could look like. This includes the difficult question of how the Eurozone could be made more breathable, including possible exits from it, and what this means in term of different circles of integration.<sup>10</sup> In his last book, Loukas Tsoukalis argues that some sacred cows, like free movement, might need to be slain in order for the EU to stand on firmer ground.<sup>11</sup> Saying that a pause in integration is necessary for now, as former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine advocates, would be a good start.<sup>12</sup>

**Renaud Thillaye** is senior consultant at Flint Global and research associate at Policy Network. He writes in personal capacity.

## Germany must recognise the limits of integration for its own sake

*Folke große Deters*

Every party in the German Bundestag is in favour of European integration. Brexit was a shock, and prompted a debate with an overwhelmingly confrontational tone. Even left-wing and liberal journalists wanted to ensure that the UK paid for its fateful, foolhardy decision. Otherwise, they argued, more countries would be tempted to leave as well. It seemed that they wanted to confirm every bad stereotype regarding the oppressive and undemocratic European Union. European integration remains an attractive prospect many countries and regions but the Union has obviously ceased to believe in its own desirability.

Threats of a punitive reaction show Europe's basic problem very clearly. A united Europe must offer the vision of a better life for everyone. Supporters of 'remain' all over the continent must not disaggregate the ideals of European unity, European democracy and social justice. This means concretely:

1. Let us accept the democratic vote! I agree with Jeremy Corbyn and others within Labour who claim that the results of this referendum have to be accepted and implemented. Real left-wing politicians respect democratic decisions even if they do not like them. Statements which doubt the legitimacy of the referendum on grounds of generational justice – the old determining the future of the young – are beside the point. Democracy means 'one person – one vote.' This basic principle is indispensable.
2. A vote against the European Union is not a vote against international cooperation in general. It is not a vote against friendship between our nations. Britain and Germany cannot change the fact that we are neighbours. Left-wing parties in the UK and in Europe should argue for respectful and cooperative negotiations between the European Union and the United Kingdom. The result must be a tight partnership and a fair allocation of burdens. The door must always be kept open for a return in the European Union, if one day the peoples of the UK and the European Union decide to form a closer union again.
3. Left-wing Parties in the UK and in Europe should stay in close contact and discuss an socialist vision of Europe. We must maintain and work on our vision of a democratic, social and united Europe, even outwith the structures of the EU.
4. So what is to be done to find such a vision? We should not only mention the war. Of course the European Union is a peace project. But this is insufficient justification for a project of 'ever closer union'. For this we need the ability and the will to create a better life for every European, centred on our shared principles of freedom, social justice and protection of the environment.

5. We must not promote a ‘reason of the Union’, analagous to the Staatsräson (reason of state) of the nineteenth-century Great Powers. Of course we should not dismiss the progress which has been achieved within the European Union. Freedom of travel and European citizenship are not self-evident. But this does not mean that we have to defend any action of the current European institutions. Left politicians should not give the impression that an abstract European interest is more important than the concrete interests of their voters. The best example for this attitude was the discussion about the signing of CETA, the planned free trade agreement with Canada. Even those who rejected this agreement and its special courts for investors attacked the government of the Belgian province Wallonia for their ‘blockade’. Joint European action is not an end in itself, to which all other objectives must be subordinated. We must make it clear. We are in favor of European integration. In the same way, we stand for democracy, social justice and ecological responsibility. We are not willing to abandon this demand in order to speed up or facilitate European integration.

These recommendations are difficult to put into practice. All over Europe, the competing imperatives outlined above have left social democratic parties stranded. Political reality is complex and sometimes requires complex answers. The difficult task will be to ensure the re-politicization of European politics, without jeopardizing the objective of European integration.

**Folke große Deters** is standing as an SPD candidate for the parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia at the regional election of May 2017.

## **Sweden left bemused and alienated by Brexit vote**

*Katrine Marçal*

Brexit has had a very limited effect on Swedish politics. There is no significant constituency for Euroscepticism. Traditionally in Sweden, the Left party and the Green party that have been anti-EU. The Social Democrats who are now in government with the Greens have always been split. But the contemporary Swedish critique of the EU tends to focus on how the European Court of Justice and the ECB are institutionalizing neoliberal economic policy. It has therefore been difficult for Swedish EU-sceptics to relate to the British debate, centred on questions of sovereignty and immigration.

The only party to openly celebrate the Brexit vote were the far right Sweden Democrats. They are formally in favor of Sweden leaving the EU, but do not campaign on the issue because there is so little support for leaving. The Swedish people voted in 1993 to join the EU with a narrow margin, but then voted not to join the euro ten years later. These two referendums appear to have settled the debate for the

foreseeable future. Immigration is a very big issue in Sweden, but European free movement is not. Sweden's high wage, high productivity labor market has also prevented many of the immigration related problems seen in Britain.

It is therefore very hard for most Swedes to understand why Britain wants to leave. Swedes are not very enthusiastic about their EU membership but they cannot see the sense in leaving.

The Swedish government is worried about EU becoming more protectionist without Britain; free trade is an important principle for Swedish social democrats, who have long prioritised adaptation over protection as their preferred response to globalisation. Swedish business enjoys strong ties with the UK. In theory, Sweden would therefore naturally want Britain to get the best possible trade deal with the EU. They are not, however, willing to bend over backwards to secure a good deal for the UK. Sweden did not want Britain to leave the EU in the first place. How can it then be our responsibility to make sure Britain gets a good divorce?

The single biggest policy issue for Sweden is what will happen to the many Swedes living in the UK. There are 150,000 Swedes in London alone – making the British capital one of Sweden's larger cities.

The response of the British left to Brexit has been unremittingly disappointing; indeed the British left seems to have too many internal problems even to have something that can be called a response. The problem is at least partly one of intellectual and institutional exhaustion. It's obvious that the left in Europe needs new platforms to meet, discuss and share experiences. Even if Brexit is hard to relate to for the Swedish left, the threats of far right populism and the controversy surrounding immigration are not. The starting point must be that none of us really understand either economics or politics any more. We're in a new paradigm. If we don't make a joint effort to understand this new paradigm, we will never deserve the trust of European publics again.

**Katrine Marçal** is a Swedish writer and journalist. She is the author of *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner? A Story About Women and Economics* (Portobello: 2015).

## Referendums and the challenge to Italian democracy

*Lilia Giugni*

Italy's reactions to Brexit, which have occupied a central position in the national media, need to be framed within the context of Italy's complex relationship with the EU.

Long perceived by Italian voters as either a benevolent *deus ex machina* or a structure of incentives and opportunities that constrained the country to behave

virtuously, the European Union has witnessed a dramatic decline in its popularity after the 2008 financial crisis. Euroscepticism has become central to the discourse of Italian parties on both sides of the political spectrum. Even mainstream politicians, including former Prime Minister Renzi, have alternately used the EU as either a scapegoat or a source of legitimacy, notably modifying their rhetorical strategies depending on their audiences.

With this in mind, it is easier to understand the ways in which British voters' decision to leave the EU reinforced the position of Italy's strongest Eurosceptics (the Northern League and The Five Stars Movement). These parties, which now explicitly call for a referendum on Italy's EU membership, follow the latest French and Dutch political developments attentively. As a result, Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party (PD), a mildly progressive organisation that has come to occupy the centre of the Italian political space, appears increasingly under pressure.

Finally, one should not forget that Italian citizens have been called to vote on a proposed constitutional reform not even six months after Brexit and just a few weeks after Trump's election as US president. The nature and the results of the Italian constitutional referendum were quite complex, and the comparisons that national and especially foreign media drew among these three events were often inappropriate and misleading. However, it can certainly be argued that Brexit, even more than Trump's success, consolidated the claims of those Italian political actors that prefer referenda and other instruments of direct (according to many, plebiscitary) democracy to mechanisms typical of representative democracy. This include, of course, the Five Stars Movement, which has made these principles the very core of its political vision. Yet it also encompasses specific tendencies within the PD and leads to many tensions within the centre-left.

In other words, not only the outcome of the British vote on Brexit, but also its procedural aspects have been used instrumentally by Italian political actors.

There are few points of contact between the Italian and British lefts on the question of Brexit. Always a Euro-sceptic, as epitomised by his half-hearted 'Remain' stance, Jeremy Corbyn declared in his first speech of 2017 that the UK could be better off outside the European Union and once the free movement of European workers in Britain is abolished. This may be seen as a tactical attempt to reconnect with disenfranchised voters, by flirting with populist claims. However, Labour appears more than ever on the defensive, passively suffering the initiatives of the Tory's government and unable to frame a coherent narrative on the post-Brexit future.

Matteo Renzi's position, of course, is very different from Corbyn's. Having resigned as Prime Minister after the majority of the Italians rejected the constitutional amendments he had proposed, he still leads the Democratic Party and is a credible candidate for the next elections. The new cabinet, led by fellow Democrat Gentiloni,

includes most of his allies and former ministers. Even though Renzi's popularity has significantly declined and he currently faces an internal upheaval within the PD, his grip on the party's core electorate is probably stronger than that of his Labour equivalent.

At the same time, the two politicians have often be said to pursue rather dissimilar goals. For instance, it has been argued that Corbyn's main objective is not necessarily to attract new (predominantly middle-class) voters in order to win the next General Election, but rather to reshape left-wing politics, and gradually but permanently change the Labour Party. Renzi, by contrast, has been mostly portrayed as a master of *Realpolitik* and an admirer of Blair, ready to compromise even on core identity issues in order to make his party more electable and secure power. These two leaders can be actually seen as representing the two extremes on the current Western European progressive parties' political spectrum. Despite their differences, they both struggle to find effective, sustainable strategies to contain the populist right.

This study in contrasts has its own significance. Labour's and the PD's challenges are the same as those faced by the European left as a whole. Innovative progressive narratives as well as guidelines for action cannot be developed exclusively at a national level. Left-wing parties should not only cooperate with each other within international networks and platforms, but should also formalise and increase existing forms of policy transfer and lesson-sharing at all levels, including that of electoral strategy.

**Lilia Giugni** has recently completed a Ph.D. in Comparative Politics at the University of Cambridge. She is chair of *FCome*, an Italian and international feminist organisation: [www.fcome.org](http://www.fcome.org).

## Europe's not going away. So what now?

*Ania Skrzypek*

Throughout the saga of Britain's referendum on EU membership, ever-harsher circumstances have bred ever-more unrealistic hopes. First, the EU hoped that the stunt of two days of heavy negotiations on the special deal for Britain would help keep the referendum on hold. It didn't. Then, there was the hope that 'remain' would hang on, despite polls that were heading in the wrong direction. It didn't. Last but not least, the losing side have hoped that Theresa May's 'Brexit means Brexit' would, in the end, translate into a hybrid construction, half-way between full membership and participation in the Single Market. This is not the direction Britain's Conservatives have chosen.

There is no easy answer as to what the European left should do now. As far as UK is concerned, the referendum's effects on Labour have been devastating. This is not only because it placed itself in the losing remain camp. That is a standard political risk, which any party has to accept articulating any political position. The real problem is that, regardless of the official line, the age-old inner conflict between Europhiles and Eurosceptics remained unsettled. Since the referendum, disagreements have only escalated, as the party battles over questions of free movement, single market access, and the recovery of its Eurosceptic working-class vote. There was therefore no way that the Labour Party could have credibly presented itself as a platform for all those hoping that 23rd June had been nothing but a bad dream. The internal divide over Labour's response has been resulted in a narrow perspective on the opening negotiating position: seeking the 'Best deal for Britain'. This focus detracts attention the fact that the best – or for that matter any – deal will depend not only on the UK, but on what sort of EU will be at the other side of the negotiating table.

It would be naive to think that after Brexit happens, the European Union will lose its *raison d'être*. Rather, one should understand that the UK referendum came as one blow too many during the existential crisis of the European project, which has been going on for nearly a quarter of a century. It is therefore likely to provoke a debate about potential future scenarios for European integration. At this point three major positions are being debated in European capitals.

The first is the simplest. It builds on the argument that the UK is more or less unique in never having been entirely committed to the EU as a project. Brexit opens a chance to create a closer Union. In that spirit, the negotiations should be as tough as possible to become a warning for all those, who would think of N-exit (The Netherlands), Öxit (Austria), or Frexit (France).

Secondly, there are those who say that, alongside the Greek crisis, this development proves that the European Community only functioned well at its the outset. Hence it would be desirable to retreat to the Union of core and peripheries; Britain should not be the last country to leave.

Thirdly, there are those who claim that it is the European Monetary Union that is the truly indispensable element of integration. Brexit is a sideshow. Britain should be let go with minimal drama, and effort should instead be focused on resolving the crisis of the Eurozone and enhancing cooperation within it.

These three possible scenarios – which are not mutually exclusive – attract a range of supporters within European social democracy. There is no consensus as to which outcome would be most favourable. The situation is complicated further by the large number of European elections that will take place in 2017: in the Netherlands and Bulgaria, shortly followed by France, Germany and Czech Republic. At this point, one hesitates to believe in any polls. Those available show that the situation is

dynamic. The rise of diverse populist and radical movements, opposed to EU integration, will make any negotiation process difficult.

Social democrats cannot solely focus their electoral and strategic efforts on these anti-systemic, skeptical, rejectionist movements, however. But their success is an indication of our vulnerability. In the UK the result of the referendum was interpreted as the major rejection of European free movement. Yet it was not Poles or Latvians, or indeed any other Central and Eastern European workers, who invented zero-hour contracts, or any of the other plagues afflicting the British and European labour markets alike. The changing nature of work has taken welfare states, and the social-democratic parties that defend them, by surprise, leaving them vulnerable to new political threats. Brexit is unlikely to resolve these problems for the UK. Even if there was a limit put to the freedom of movement of people, or even the deportation of European workers, the problem will not be solved. Indeed, the breakdown of a Europe-wide system of labour regulation might lead to the further marginalization of foreign workers. These would become a shadow workforce, removed from the scope of employment regulations and social security. This would create further disastrous social, economic and political effects.

Whatever happens after Brexit, the English channel cannot insulate Britain from Europe's political, economic and social challenges. Together in the EU or apart, these will remain of the same magnitude. We must jointly draw lessons from the referendum, and regenerate our collective potential to shape the future of our continent.

**Ania Skrzypek** is Senior Research Fellow at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS).

## Notes

- 1 Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Ireland and Britain: a Unique Economic Partnership* (DFA, 2014). <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/statevisit2014/Economic-Facts.pdf>.
- 2 S. Maybin, 'How many Britons are entitled to an Irish passport?', *BBC Magazine*, 02.09.16: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37246769>.
- 3 A. Barrett *et al.*, *Scoping the Possible Economic Implications of Brexit on Ireland* (ESRI, 2015): <https://www.esri.ie/news/new-report-on-the-economic-consequences-of-brex-it-for-ireland/>
- 4 S. Morris and N. Callanan, 'Barclays Picks Dublin as Post-Brexit EU Headquarters', *Bloomberg Business News*: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-26/barclays-said-to-pick-dublin-as-eu-headquarters-after-brex-it>.
- 5 'Irish most optimistic about EU's future – Eurobarometer autumn 2016': [https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/irish-most-optimistic-about-eu-s-future-eurobarometer-autumn-2016\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/irish-most-optimistic-about-eu-s-future-eurobarometer-autumn-2016_en).

- 6 F. Kelly, 'Sinn Féin manifesto: election platform both left and populist', 09.02.16: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/sinn-f%C3%A9in-manifesto-election-platform-both-left-and-populist-1.2528660>.
- 7 R. Thillaye, 'French view: Social Europe as the human face of European integration', *Clingendael*, 01 June 2016, <https://www.clingendael.nl/publication/french-view-social-europe-human-face-european-integration>.
- 8 John Gray, 'The Closing of the Liberal Mind', *New Statesman*, 07 November 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/11/closing-liberal-mind>.
- 9 C. Bickerton, 'Europe in revolt', *Prospect Magazine*, 13 December 2016, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/europe-in-revolt>.
- 10 R. Thillaye, 'Europe 2.0? The EU after the British referendum', *Policy Network*, 24 May 2016, [http://policy-network.net/pno\\_detail.aspx?ID=5104&title=Europe+2.0%3f+The+EU+after+the+British+referendum](http://policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=5104&title=Europe+2.0%3f+The+EU+after+the+British+referendum)
- 11 L. Tsoukalis, *In Defence of Europe. Can the European Project Be Saved?*, Oxford University Press, 2016.
- 12 P. Briançon, 'Hubert Védrine: It's time for a European pause', *Politico*, 3 June 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/hubert-vedrine-its-time-for-a-european-pause-eu-integration-foreign-policy/>