

## **Good luck, Brits!**

Today, by your government's decision, your country will leave the European Union. You are back in control, they tell you. Strangely, the original ideas of becoming "a Singapore in the Channel", of moving closer to the US, of being an independent world power again, are now heard much less than they were in the run-up and aftermath of the referendum. Indeed, the Prime Minister has been talking about a particularly strong relationship with the EU. We shall have to wait and see what he means by this.

We should not be malicious! We should remember what we all might miss – miss so much in fact that you all, or perhaps some of you, might want to come back. If you do, you are welcome!

We other Europeans might miss

- your experience in global affairs,
- your common sense,
- your voice for Europe in the UN Security Council,
- your share in Europe's business,
- your clout in Europe's civil society,
- your humour,
- and surely a lot of other things, too.

You Brits might miss:

- being part of a community of 500 million that can stand up to China, Russia, and the US,
- the free flow of goods and services,
- a free market of 4.5 million square kilometres,
- 4.5 million square kilometres to travel to, reside in, and associate in with no borders to stop you,
- free movement within the EU for business, jobs, training, studying, learning, teaching, and leisure,
- consular protection from any EU member consular representation world-wide,
- legal protection through the European courts,
- democratic representation in the European parliament,
- an influence in shaping EU Commission policies,
- a transnational community with common principles,
- a say in shaping a European future,
- living the European dream,
- and probably a few other things as well.

And mind you: the EU will remain a (secondary) subject of international law – even without the UK. The EU will continue to be a political force to be reckoned with. Brussels will continue to be place for British decision makers to go to quite a lot.

Still, this is not the end of the world. We should keep as many bridges open as possible, build new ones, and save what can possibly be saved from the last 40-odd years. Above all, we should think of Europe as more than the European Union. The plain truth is that in many ways, our common defence policy for one, we cannot afford to let the Channel become a schism. We need to stick together as Europeans, to fend off what may quite probably come our way courtesy of Messrs. Putin, Li Ping, and indeed Donald Trump, not to speak of a few others. There are other areas, too, where we need to stand together. It will depend on all of us to do so.

Business is definitely not everything. There exists a European notion of human and civil rights, developed not least by British philosophers. There exists a common history which is far older and more persuasive than a Lisbon or Maastricht or whatever EU treaty. There exists a European demos, to which you, or at least all those of you who want to, will continue to belong. There exists a European culture, which you have done more than your share in shaping, and will beyond any doubt continue to help shape. There exists a no. 1 language in Europe, which will continue to be English. There exists a European civil society, in which British players will continue to play a commandeering role. And above all: There exists a plethora of personal and family ties that will not disappear or diminish.

So, in wishing the Brits the very best of luck in coping with their new situation, we should also do everything we can to not let them drift further than absolutely necessary. We are and will be Europeans together.

You Brits will need time to reflect on what has happened. Again, if, in whatever way, you or some of you wish to come back at any point, I sincerely hope our governments and parliaments will welcome you back. We, the people, certainly will!

Sent from Berlin on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2020

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