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"Britain's membership renegotiation: short-term impacts and long-term consequences for the UK and the EU"

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On the 23 of June British people will make a difficult decision, one of the most important in the modern history of this nation. An issue of fundamental importance for generations to come is left to the people to decide through a referendum. The situation is very serious because the choice of each individual in the referendum - made once in the lifetime - will have to be between yes or no. And the day after the consequences will hit. This decision will have impact on the economic future of the Britons, on global relevance of the nation, on their perception of themselves, their place in Europe and the world. It will also have impact on the future paths of European integration.

For some days now there has been formal referendum campaign. Intellectuals and businesses are rather silent, while politicians try to get to the guts of voters. "Leave" campaigners do it through playing on emotions. They do not bother about details, numbers, facts nor about presenting anything close to an alternative solution. This approach is more successful and seems to be capturing more attention of the Brits than the one of the "remain" campaign. According to the leave side, if the Brits vote to leave the European Union, on the day after the referendum the nation as well as individual citizens will be simply better off. In this context the "remain" campaigners using facts and figures, sound boring, their vision is less attractive, and indeed not reaching the hearts of potential voters.

The issues which have become the core of the February deal are rather far from what should matter in a decision of such a historical importance. The importance of the referendum is not appreciated by public at large. The choice of issues for negotiations has certainly added to this state of mind and emotional engagement.

It seems common sense that the issue of this magnitude deserves a true debate. This debate should be about facts and ideas, assessment of the past and looking into the future, it should be about ideas and concrete arguments, and it should involve the old and the young.

On this side of the Channel, we have lived more than 40 years with the British exceptionalism. There has always been sufficient flexibility in the European treaties to accommodate individual member states requesting derogations, opt outs or opt ins. British governments have been the champions of using this flexibility. We have been designing with frequency special arrangements for the Brits to keep them on board. We have been giving up to their vetoes, some of them leading to the need of intergovernmental agreements instead of treaty based solutions. We have been

responding to budget related requirements, including rebate system and the size of European budget.

However, the February deal is different. In response to the irreversibility demand, what is proposed is not a new privilege for the Britons but a change to the way the Union functions. This is, indeed, very relevant for the irreversibility of the proposal. Some elements of the deal are for the twenty eight, others for all non euro member states. It has been admitted that members of the Union can aim at different destinations.

On this side of the Channel we appreciate the generosity of the proposal. Some of the "leave" campaigners say "EU wants so desperately to keep UK in that once we are out they will offer us much better conditions of participating in single market". This is a wrong expectation. Yes, we have hammered a reasonable, generous, fair agreement, decided unanimously amongst member states. There will be legislative proposals prepared by the European Commission, coming also to EP for legislative procedure. Some of the agreed provisions will require incorporation into new treaties when these will be revised. The deal follows Mr Cameron's four baskets. One might say that text is technically complicated, but there will be no discrimination of member states on the ground of currency, mutual respect between euro and non euro is ensured, non euro states will not undermine the euro area while in the single market their interests will be fully respected. Emergency break mechanism would support this relationship. The ever closer union principle will continue not to be a legal basis. It has never been used as such for legislation. It will continue to coexist with the reality of the Union which is the one of differentiated integration. U.K. has always been a champion in the category of member states not participating in many activities. This will continue. The deal is legally binding within the framework of international law and there is no reason not to expect it to be fulfilled by member states. It is a clearly expressed will of the twenty eight. The European Parliament will be involved in legislation procedure implementing the deal or any treaty change related to it.

One can expect that in the British referendum, as in general in referenda, people will vote with their hearts rather than with their brains. It is very likely that they will be responding to issues that go far beyond the ballot paper. The worrying issue is that "leave" campaigners are those who for most of the time did not care about the European Union, who were less involved in shaping the Union, in benefitting from the membership. The worrying issue is also that as far as economic situation and the migration crisis are concerned next couple of months can bring new events where short term immediate solutions are not feasible. In particular migration related issues seem to be top rank issues in British public opinion, ahead of bread and butter economic domestic issues. But it is also obvious that we will spare no effort to ensure that EU agreement with Turkey is implemented properly and we will be working with African countries using that agreement as a template for solution.

If Scotland, Ireland, Wales vote to stay, while the English vote against, still the vote of the latter will be decisive. That is why it is so important that those who see the future of the U.K. in the Union should very clearly explain that promoters of Brexit are confusing people. At the same time they do not offer any alternative that would keep

FDIs in UK, keep lower prices, cheaper mobile and data charges etc. in the WTO there are still many high tariffs and it lacks framework for services. Outside the Union, the global world will be less conducive to the relevance of UK. The Britons will have no impact on EU global role. Europe has been for decades a platform for the British greatness. It would not be anymore.

With negative result of the referendum vote, one can assume that the UK determination to NATO will continue. But UK outside the EU would be a destabilizing factor. The biggest champion of open market and free trade will be gone. The risk of protectionism would cost jobs. The front against Russian aggression will be weakened. These would be bad news for EU.