
EU-UK : each go their separate ways. Hennessy (historian), “sad and worried.” Scottish independence vote looming

“It's a heartbreaking moment, one of deep sadness for me. A historic moment. After 47 years and one month Britain is leaving the European Union.” **Peter Hennessy**, Catholic, a long career as a journalist for the "Times", "Financial Times" and "The Economist", before becoming the most distinguished British historian (he teaches Contemporary History at Queen Mary University in London), is very saddened. “I have always been pro-EU and I believe that our presence in Europe was one of the pillars of our prosperity and influence on the global stage”, he told SIR. “I am also concerned about Scotland, because I think there is a good chance that our Scottish cousins will want to leave, with devastating consequences for the Union of England and Scotland initiated in 1707.” On Friday January 31, at 11 pm local time, Lord Hennessy will listen to the same prelude by Bach that Premier Ted Heath played on the clavichord for his family at Downing street, on the evening of 28 October 1971, when Great Britain first decided to join the then European Economic Community. “Bach let us in,” he said, “and Bach will let us out, but it will be a time of great sadness. That's how I felt when MEPs in Brussels sang the farewell song Auld Lang Syne, somewhat hoping that the separation from their British colleagues would only be a farewell.”



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[It's impossible to answer that question. When General De Gaulle refused our first request to enter Europe in 1963, he said that the British had their own way of doing politics, unique compared to other European countries. I think he was right. I believe that we have always felt different, despite being very much a part of Europe. The fact that we were a maritime power, on the margins of the continent, overlooking the rest of the world, has fuelled these sentiments.](#)

What has changed since the early 1960s, when Prime Minister MacMillan wanted the UK to enter Europe and General De Gaulle opposed it?

There was a strong element of idealism back then, Europe was seen as a means to prevent another war. It was important for Britain to ensure there would be no further conflict. There was, however, also a political factor. Europe was regarded as instrumental to sustaining our influence in the world. The real question now is whether, in our history, the past forty-seven years and a month of presence in Europe will be recorded as a missed opportunity or a wasted effort.



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There are many aspects. For years, the European issue was viewed as a tedious one, until suddenly, when it became a matter of immigration, it began to worry the British people. When Great Britain joined Europe in 1973, difficult years of rising oil prices ensued and our country did not share the prosperity of the early years of the European Economic Community. Moreover, as time went by, Europe increasingly became a political union and not just a matter confined to trade agreements, which never appealed to those who want to protect our political independence, so-called sovereignty. Finally, British politicians became accustomed to using the EU as a scapegoat, blaming Europe for what went wrong in the country. The British prime ministers went to Brussels for years, got what they wanted and then came back and started blaming the EU.

Will Prime Minister Boris Johnson make Britain a better or a worst Country ?

It's hard to answer that question. It may be that Mr. Johnson will work hard to build a just society, although he is certainly not guided by moral principles, but only by the desire to remain Prime Minister. He gained votes that were Labour votes for many years, but in those constituencies those who voted for him are asking for jobs, and I don't see how the government can guarantee them.

Is there a risk of Brexit causing Scotland to secede?

That' s my greatest fear. I believe that it could truly happen, and if it did, it would have a very strong psychological impact on the United Kingdom because, since 1700, our stories, our politics and our identity have been intertwined. Even though there is a different legal and educational system north of Hadrian's Wall, Scotland has always enriched the UK scientifically and culturally. The loss would be enormous. Unfortunately the Scots don't like to be ruled by conservatives and Boris Johnson represents just the politician that the people north of Hadrian's Wall would never elect.

Silvia Guzzetti from London