
Brexit: goodbye or the last farewell?

Put in big words, it could be best described as a heterogenesis of ends. However, to make a long story short, it can be summed up as follows: Brexit emerged above all from the fear of the invasion of foreign immigrants. Now that Brexit has become a reality, the same British citizens have become extra-EU citizens.

As of 1 February, the United Kingdom has taken its course outside the European Union, branded as a major enemy of British freedom of choice and action. After 47 years with one foot inside and the other outside the “common European home”, British voters decided - freely and democratically (though one might wonder to what extent consciously) - to leave the EU. Virtually nothing will change until next December 31, given an 11-month “transition period” agreed between London and EU-27 to define the pending issues and start talks on the future partnership. Finally, from January 2021, Queen Elizabeth's Kingdom will to all intents and purposes be a “third Country” for Europe, alongside Uruguay, Mozambique or Vietnam.

In the meantime, however, as befits common sense and business, London and Brussels will be negotiating to remain friends and travel companions because - this is clear to (almost) everyone - they are facing the same challenges: economy, trade, climate, security, demography, energy, migration; as well as fisheries regulations, welfare standards, health, taxation. Above all, the rights of the respective citizens, European and British, are at stake: in fact, we cannot even imagine creating anti-historical barriers, for example regarding the movement of tourists or young people wishing to complete their studies abroad, in either side of the Channel.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who led his country out of the Union, is already threatening disaster. He will probably need to realize that he has signed a “withdrawal agreement” that requires him to comply with EU rules throughout the transition period and honour the commitments undertaken with other 27 States of the Union, including paying budget commitments amounting to €36 billion to EU coffers. Moreover, Boris Johnson has a set of inescapable obligations ahead of him, especially when divorce celebrations are over and all nationalistic revivals have come to an end (on February 3 he mentioned a free trade agreement with the EU, with no other rules). These are: to mend public opinion's Brexit-inflicted rift; to prevent divisions and terrorism from being reignited in Northern Ireland's fragile situation; to avoid the secession of Scotland - which was and remains pro-European; to restore confidence in the country's political institutions that in the past four years showed signs of uncertainty, confusion, shortness of breath and ditched promises; to ensure there are no negative repercussions for the national economy (50% of British imports and exports are with the EU).

At Community level, however, it is important to honestly acknowledge the mistakes that have been made, not with regard to the relations with London, but as to its effectiveness and the ability to adequately serve the interests of European citizens. The Conference on the Future of Europe, scheduled to kick off on 9 May, has been conceived with those very sacrosanct objectives in mind. It's an opportunity not to be missed.

The British, and Europe itself, will then have to demonstrate that wise words uttered on various occasions over the last few days, re-launched by the European and British bishops, are not idle talk: that is, the United Kingdom is outside the European Union but it solidly remains in Europe. History, culture, language, traditions and friendships are not annulled by referendum. After all, the traditional Scottish “Farewell Song” (“Auld Lang Syne”), sung on 30 January in the Chamber of the European Parliament, is much more effective in the French version: “Ce n'est qu'un au revoir”, “It's just a

goodbye.”

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