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Topic: [How strong is the European identity in the UK?](#)

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Konstantinos I was just wondering about this and I'd like a Brit to answer me on this particular topic. By reading various posts on several forums I have come to the conclusion that Brits don't really feel European, neither do they support their country's membership. Whoever is willing to explain the situation in the UK to me, please do.

Thank you

25 December 2009 at 16:59

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Syawush I'll answer that question.

The United Kingdom joined the EEC on 1 January 1973 (along with the Republic of Ireland and Denmark), via a British Act of Parliament; the European Communities Act of 1972. The UK have remained in this 'union' as it's now called ever since.

Britain's role in continental Europe has ALWAYS been a controversial subject. You have to remember how attached we were to our former Empire (the greatest and most extensive the world has ever seen). At one point, a quarter of the world's land mass was taken by the British or governed by the UK in some other sense. Europe was a distraction. Britain never really cared about Europe tbh, and nothing has changed. Our policy had been to maintain the balance of power on the continent between whichever forces. As long as one single nation did not dominate over others.

Europe have a different way of life, a different mentality, a different way of looking at things, a different culture, languages, and a vastly different political history in comparison to that of the UK.

All Europe did was go to war and start revolutions of all persuasions. This isn't the civil, reserved British way and never will be.

Britain signed up to a common market, a free trade area with Europe - and not a political union. Over 75% of UK laws are now made in Brussels not Westminster. The majority of Brits would rather we left this union project amicably. Thatcher once said 'all our problems have come from Europe. All our solutions have come from the English-speaking world.' And you know, she had a point.

29 December 2009 at 14:42

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Syawush Furthermore, the UK will never join the European Single Currency at any point in the future (not after Black Wednesday 1992, in which Britain was forced to leave the ERM - the European Exchange-Rate Mechanism, in which the pound sterling had been deliberately pegged to the German Deutschmark, the value of which fell dramatically - which was a precursor to a single currency.)

The UK partly liberated Europe during WWII and we feel as though we've been given nothing in return. As I mentioned earlier, the UK has never been successfully invaded or occupied for 1000 years (since William the Conqueror in 1066). Compare that to Europe - you've had so many uprisings, political revolutions etc. Our political way of thinking is not the same.

29 December 2009 at 14:49

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Syawush If you have any further questions you'd like answered, please let me know.
Thank You.

29 December 2009 at 14:50

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Syawush Just to add one other point, our political establishment have historically looked to North America, principally the United States, along with the Commonwealth - which is the term used for the group of countries which were part of the old British Empire and her former Dominions (Rwanda being the exception as they are now a party to the Commonwealth but were NOT part of the British Empire). Europe was the 'old world' where everything is just so different and very un-Anglo-Saxon.

29 December 2009 at 15:02

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Kane The British HATE europe

29 December 2009 at 16:51

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James Personally i don't that the British people hate Europe. Many British people go on holiday to EU countries and we get cheaper flights when travelling to one. I just think that the British peoples identity is very different from the European identity which is, no offence a very merged one. We'd rather be an independant nation.

30 December 2009 at 10:59

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Nikki I don't think the British hate Europe either. I lived abroad as a child and loved the experience, consequently I frequently holiday in European countries as often as financially possible. I love the culture and traditions that identify other European countries, and feel that sadly, we don't seem to have many of our own.... Morris dancers maybe?? LOL. I dislike the fact that all we seem to be known for these days is lager louts and football. Surely there is more than that we have to offer. At the end of the day, live and let live, enjoy and learn from each others cultures and shared experiences.

30 December 2009 at 15:02

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Konstantinos Thank you all for your responds. But again I see that there's not a common opinion on this matter. Well, I have another question now. If the UK's cabinets have been disappointed about the country's membership, then why haven't they done something about it? If the EU has been so full of problems for the UK, why is the UK still in?

31 December 2009 at 05:58

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Syawush Konstantinos, there is a common unanimous opinion within the wider UK population on Britain's continued membership of the European Union, which is to withdraw amicably, if this project of integration into some sort of 'superstate' runs along.

However, in reality withdrawal isn't really a viable option. You see, it can seem kinda strange to an outsider, but the UK wants the best of both worlds - to be both Atlanticist and to be at the heart of Europe simultaneously (notwithstanding Britain's EU paranoia). I guess, our lawmakers and governments also wouldn't have the courage to 'retreat'.

31 December 2009 at 16:17

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Nico Always keep in mind that in a democracy there is always a strong opposition. As long as we accept that, these discussions will go on and as long as they can go on they will benefit us as it has done throughout the existence of the EU. Personally I am for a Super State in the sense that the EU will have and is able to maintain a strong position in the world but with a small as possible government. As for the UK it is indeed different but that is not a problem because we are all different.

But underneath these differences is a lot of common ground, also in The Netherlands where I am from, even though the ground we walk on was not created by God as the English say. So there is a strong binding force and leaving the EU will be a purely theoretical option for a long time to come.

01 January at 02:56

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Nikki You all seem very knowledgeable about this/politics, which I confess I am not. However, as an ordinary, everyday citizen of the UK, I see the headlines in the papers reporting negatively about the

EU and results of various opinion polls; but to someone who is NOT really up on the political scene, I wish they'd explain in laymans terms, why some people think it so bad to be more unified with the rest of Europe; my family experience there was fantastic, and I can think of many positive examples we had abroad, that I wish we'd adopt in the UK. Is this just my perception? Perhaps I'm being naive? I'm one of the many in England, who can't wait to leave and live somewhere else.

01 January at 15:30

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Marco It's really a pity that an important european country as UK hasn't a strong european identity i like everything that is british and when i hear that you don't feel european i'm displeased, i know that you are an island but together we can be tough and powerful, so if you want you're welcome in Venice =)...have a nice day...=)

02 January at 04:53

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Nico There are many reasons why people are against the EU the most important seems to be that there is a lot of power concentrated in Brussels. But how did it get there? Well it was voluntarily brought to Brussels by the national politicians and they did so because it was their political intention and they got a mandate from the the voters as they voted for these politicians. Since that was a majority it is a minority that is more or less against but as long as they don't go to the streets and demand to leave the EU it is not really a problem. Off course that can all change but then you need some sort of major crisis but so far the cooperation within the EU has prevented that. By the way I stayed in London for 8 months back in 1968 and always met a warm welcome. Perhaps it was a different country then? I don't think people have changed that much. Anyway like Marco I also like to say that if you are welcome in The Hague.

03 January at 09:41

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Konstantinos I believe that what the UK fears is "babysitting" less powerful countries without getting anything in return. I understand that completely, but so do France, Germany etc. After the Lisbon treaty all EU members have agreed to the project of the common constitution which is something that brings the EU closer the Federation that is being discussed in an another topic. This cannot happen though, if all members don't co-operate. Politically the UK has been an active member, but we see that many British citizens haven't developed the same European mentality as most of the other European citizens. Well, you can call that arrogance or anything you like, but I think that the UK would benefit a lot more by being a member-state of a powerful European Union, than trying on its own to keep on the same pace as the US, which is something that I believe that no country in Europe can do all by itself. We need a strong EU so that we can become competitive against economic titans such as Russia, China, and India (soon to come). The union is to everyone's best interest. I hope I was convincing enough. That's just my opinion though and I'll be happy to hear any opposition.

Thank you

03 January at 10:46

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Tanel The brutal answer to your question Konstantinos, as to why the UK is still in the EU if so many are against it and it is so full of problems, is that essentially the EU is like the mafia.

You need friends to get in, it carries some benefits but involves you giving up a great deal, you get some protection but you lose control, and once you're in, it's incredibly difficult to get out.

I'm British and I don't think we hate Europe. The Brits like certain things that Europe has to offer and it's great that we can mix and match and enjoy different foods, cultures and experiences. But what people don't like is being ruled by a foreign power. Essentially the whole concept of a European organisation has evolved from an economic trading union, which is fair enough, to a political union which is something entirely different.

The reality is that many small countries in the EU need to negotiate as a block, as it is the only way they can compete with the economic superpowers such as the US and China. In practice however the free movement of goods, services and workers *within* the EU has gone far beyond a collective trading block, and has resulted in tight integration at both macroeconomic and microeconomic level.

To reverse 40 years of gradual integration would be a huge undertaking, cost billions (if not trillions) in implementation, and then leave a huge hole needing to be filled. It wouldn't happen overnight and might take another 40 years to effect.

So, for all the dissatisfaction, withdrawal is not an option. Besides, the UK is not the economic powerhouse it once was and although it may feel that it might survive withdrawal, it's one thing to survive, quite another to thrive.

11 January at 03:53

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Sophia The British don't like the EU at all really. There are quite a few political parties which want to remove themselves from the EU entirely.

Reasons why the British don't like the EU:

- 1) Britain feels it is "better" than Europe, and that Europe looks up to Britain
- 2) The mentality that "everyone speaks english anyway so we may as well not bother to integrate ourselves into the european community as they can just do it with us"
- 3) Different culture
- 4) Different language (english people have a huge problem learning languages...)
- 5) They like the pound, and think the EU is a way of conforming
- 6) The idea that all the immigrants come to Britain (I bet a lot of people haven't even considered we can move to any part of the EU if we wanted)

That's the GENERAL British mentality but obviously that's not reflective of everyone. I - for one - am for the EU.

19 February at 17:30

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William Also the reason that withdrawing from the EU seems to have a lot of support is because those who want change will speak up. A large number of people are satisfied with the current position of the UK in the EU, but they don't have a lot of reason to shout about it!

21 February at 18:47

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Luke I'm British and I want the UK to embrace the EU a lot more than it has been.

I actually want to see the Euro introduced in the UK. We need to move towards a more globalized world and I think that the EU is a step towards that.

In the UK we have three mainstream parties. Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats. Labour and Conservatives are both relatively anti EU. The Liberal Democrats however want the UK to embrace the EU much more.

Unfortunately however, the Liberal Democrats tend to get the smallest amount of votes out of the mainstream parties. This is because a lot of British people feel a strong sense of national pride and view the EU as a threat to their identity and culture.

I don't share this opinion at all. Cultures change all the time and trying to stand in the way of this is only trying to stand in the way of natural advancement.

22 February at 13:59

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Tanel Luke, Labour isn't "anti-EU" at all. It is very pro-EU and indeed Gordon Brown's government recently ratified the Lisbon Treaty which has taken us further into a European Federation than ever before.

The worrying thing is that there is now very little scope for renegotiation or movement in terms of national sovereignty. There was a promise of a referendum (another one broken by Labour) prior to ratification, but now a referendum would be too late in any event regardless of which government offered it.

You talk about moving towards a globalised world, but with respect that is something entirely different to what is unfolding on the European stage. Globalisation isn't happening, it's happened. Globalisation is trading with China, India, Japan, the US and Africa, it's not about 27 countries giving up their rights to self-govern in some naive hope that it will solve all their problems.

The problem is that the EU is not a vehicle for some global utopic harmony where we can all live together in peace and never go hungry. It is instead a constructed organisation intended to serve political interests, in particular those of France and Germany.

The recent near-bankruptcy of Greece has shown that being a member of the EU is by no means a guarantee of economic stability. Indeed, many economic experts suggest that it was as a result of being in the EU, and not being free to take the fiscal measures necessary, that the problem could not be averted.

Now the UK may not be in the position that Greece is in, and may be able to ride out the recession, but the principle stands. Damage can be done and unless a country is free to take the right decisions, quickly, and based on its specific needs, it is heading for disaster. At the very least, the UK has retained its currency, thereby enabling if absolutely necessary a devaluation which might stimulate exports. However, the problem the UK has is that its manufacturing industry has been systematically eroded over the past few decades, with heavy reliance on services and banking, and the collapse of the banking sector has now dealt a severe blow to the economy in any event.

Spain and Italy are currently in a precarious position too and it remains to be seen whether they will go the way of Greece. Of course, being tied in to the Euro-zone there's not a great deal they can do about it themselves.

I agree with you in that the culture issue is a red herring. There are too many cultures even within countries to feasibly talk about an EU-wide culture.

But going from saying that it is good to be friendly with your European neighbours and enjoying holidays in their countries, to say that tighter political and economic integration is "natural advancement", is far from a logical step and a very skewed view of the political realities of the EU.

23 February at 05:48

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Glenn Im from UK and to answer your question its about losing our national sovereignty to brussels. do the rest of Europe Realize? that your losing you country to E.U wake up now if you care about your country. The E.U should be for trade and going on holiday. not to ruling the UK