

Brexit.

Europe must win out in these negotiations!

Triggering Article 50 to start the procedure by which the United Kingdom will leave the European Union begins a two-year negotiation period which will have profound consequences for the future of Europe. Neither gung-ho nor naive: the EU's negotiators must simultaneously stay on neighbourly terms with London and manage to show that, economically and politically speaking, the right choice would be to remain in Europe, not leave it. Otherwise, watch out for the knock-on effect among contributor countries!

Since 1957 and the Treaty of Rome, whose 60th anniversary we have just celebrated, the European project has applied a simple principle: everyone contributes to a European budget in proportion to their resources, out of which the EU runs a spending programme reflecting the needs of each. Territories with a developmental delay have high needs and low resources: they are the beneficiaries of the Union's solidarity. The more developed areas have fewer needs and more resources; they are the net contributors, where the direct return from European policies in terms of subsidies is less in financial terms than their contribution to the EU budget. But the payoff lies elsewhere: without counting the political benefits of a geostrategic space that averts the risks of conflict thanks to the European project, their economies receive a return on investment from these solidarity mechanisms through the general development they bring about, and from which their economic players profit.

It's a bit like being a blood donor: if blood is taken correctly, donors hardly feel a thing but they contribute to the better health of those around them, which in turn contributes to their own well-being. There are two conditions that must be respected: if too much is taken, donors will be drained; and a lack of sufficient solidarity would create frustrations that would harm the European spirit in territories where the standard of living lags behind.

These are the imbalances that provide a basis for the rise in populism, especially the brand of "wealthy" populism we see in France, Sweden and Scandinavia generally, and of course the United Kingdom. The irony is that this populism takes advantage of the frustration of those who miss out on the overall prosperity of these high-GDP countries: the people in poor suburbs, working-class towns left behind by economic change, or down-at-heel, abandoned rural areas. But let us not underestimate the dangers of populism in the poorest countries, in Greece for example, if despair gets a grip on the body social. There are warning signs on that side too.

In Brexit, two issues will be particularly sensitive: the matter of those areas that want to remain European, Northern Ireland by way of the reunification of Ireland, and Scotland through an independence referendum; and the question of the single market, whose greatest beneficiaries have hitherto included London's banking sector.

Europe must demonstrate the strength of its integrated economic model and win the negotiation, and in practice that means that there must be a loser - the United Kingdom; and a winner - the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain in Europe, heavily in the case of Scotland (62%). Europe must support those that support it! It's a matter of political survival. Otherwise, it may no longer be supported by anyone!

How can it do this? Quite simply by extending the hand of friendship to the Scottish nationalist government to reassure it that a referendum vote in favour of independence would be welcomed by Europe. For Scotland is divided as to its future. In the September 2014 referendum independence received 45% of the vote. In the latest polls, supporters currently stand at 46%, the highest level since this question was first measured in 1999. In the two years to come, the SNP is gambling that this figure will grow to the point where it will carry the day. But at the same time, Euro-scepticism is growing in Scotland too, as in the United Kingdom in general.

In practice, the outcome of the Scottish referendum will depend on how Europe acts on Brexit during the next few months. Its own future is at stake. And Scotland's, too.