After Brexit: Shock and disbelief

How the UK referendum result is being received across Europe

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Will 23 June 2016 go down in history as having an equal but opposite impact to that of 9 November 1989? This is one of many questions that editors at Eurozine partner journals considered when asked for their initial responses to the Brexit decision, and its reception in their home countries.

Vicky Baker, Deputy editor, Index on Censorship (UK)
People are talking about little else other than Brexit in the UK. Whichever way they voted, many have been left worried by the political turmoil and uncertainty about what happens next. It has always been a struggle to get the British public interested in EU politics and yet suddenly it has transformed into a highly emotive topic, mostly because of the multiple longstanding problems that feed into this situation. On Friday and over the weekend of 25/26 June, there have been huge outpourings of opinions and feelings on social media, among friends and families, and even on the street. This has also been coupled with a lot resentment and mocking of voters on “the other side”, which is inevitable when complex issues are hinged on a binary question and when the campaigns use divisive tactics.

The rising intolerance and division is extremely worrying. There have been anecdotal reports of racist incidents linked to the vote, and of immigrants worrying about speaking their languages in public. Across the board, there has been an entrenchment of views (all sorts of views), without talking or listening.

Yet there are more people paying close attention to politics in this country than at any point in recent history. Could this ultimately lead to positive reforms in the UK, and also within the EU and EU countries? More people are insisting their voices are heard. It’s up to those in power (or those who will be in power when the madness subsides) to take all these voices on board and try to heal the country’s divides going forward.

Volker Weichsel, Editor, Osteuropa (Germany)
Don’t turn the Brexit vote into a forced exit!
What happened on Thursday 23 June 2016? The answer seems obvious: the United Kingdom decided to turn its back on the European Union, or, to be exact, 17.4 million out
of 46.5 million registered voters opted for “Leave”.

The truth is that we still don’t know what really happened. The future of the EU after the British referendum depends on the reaction of the remaining EU countries, first and foremost Germany. The facts are simple: the UK can leave the EU, Germany can’t. Germany can keep it alive or destroy it. Germany, together with all other EU countries, can try to keep the UK as close to the European Union as possible. London would be allowed to take the Swiss option. It would leave the EU institutions and lose its voting rights in future EU decisions, but it would keep most of the *acquis communautaire*, the body of European Union law. The other option would be to turn the voluntary Brexit into a forced exit.

To choose the first option means to keep the EU basically as it is, to take the second implies changing the EU fundamentally. The debate is already ongoing. As always in Germany, supporters of both positions claim that their solution is the only way to save Europe. But who is right? Those who warn of the negative consequences of extensive negotiations with the UK, and instead want to use the momentum and the changed balance of power to build a new Europe? A more integrated social Europe?

It’s basically the Left who are calling for this: French president Francois Hollande, Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi and German Social Democrats, who form part of the country’s ruling coalition. They see the outcome of the referendum in the UK as well as the upswing of euroscepticism essentially as a result of an economic crisis, which is caused by an EU that has fostered globalization instead of being a firewall against it.

The problem about this “solution” is that it is based on the same romantic thinking as the British Leave campaign. What these politicians want back is the European Community of the 1960s, a core Europe of six countries, without Brits, Poles, Czechs and other annoying eurosceptics. A model for a future Europe that is presented as a way to fight right-wing populism in France and Germany turns out to be a way to help populists in many other European countries to the same Pyrrhic victory that British Leave campaigners have bestowed on their country.

**Daniel Leisegang, Editor, Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik (Germany)**

In Germany, hardly anybody expected Brexit. Even now, just days after the historic vote, there is still a lot of uncertainty: does the vote lead to a breakup of the European Union or does it offer a chance to renew the union?

We don’t know for sure which path Europe will take in the near future. What we do know is that Europe and its promise of prosperity and post-national peace is at stake. Therefore, in the long run, 23 June 2016 could have a similarly far-reaching – but opposite – impact to 9 November 1989: on this day the wall that had divided western and eastern Europe for nearly 30 years finally fell. Almost another 30 years later, united Europe is threatened with disintegration.

Right-wing, nationalist and populist parties all over Europe have used the EU as a scapegoat – among them the Front National in France and the Partij voor de Vrijheid in the Netherlands. It is no surprise that, in the light of recent events, these parties feel
tempted to emulate Ukip’s anti-European campaign by calling for referenda in their respective countries – with the same short-sighted resentments, racism and falsehoods.

In order to counter the rabble-rousers and – in so doing – to preserve the European Union, we need a dramatic shift in European policy. Brexit is ultimately a result of deepening social divides that can be observed in most European countries. Hence, we need Europe not only to become more democratic, but more social too. First and foremost, we need a renunciation of the neoliberal austerity programmes imposed on the European continent, particularly since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008.

Such a political U-turn must fix the defects of an exclusively politico-economic union. Obviously, not all of the 27 remaining members of the EU will agree to this radical but necessary shift. Therefore, a “core Europe” consisting of France, Germany, Italy, Poland and other (foundling) member states must lead the way to a more democratic union, where wealth is justly reallocated among all member states. No doubt, this also implies a fundamental change in European strategy, which must be deepened rather than widened. For without such a realignment, it is highly unlikely that there will be a European Union in the future.

Michele Salvati, Editor-in-chief, *Il Mulino* (Italy)
The “trauma” caused by the Brexit result is so extraordinary, that it is really difficult to evaluate its political and economic consequences: at the moment, we can only assume that they will be serious and negative, both in the short and medium term, for the UK; and not so serious, but nonetheless negative, for the rest of the EU, the eurozone and Italy. This assumption – the only realistic one today – is all that we have as a basis for forecasting how the EU will evolve without the UK, and for expressing an opinion on how our country should behave within the EU.

Italy should fight for national flexibility margins, in order to counter any negative macroeconomic consequences of Brexit; and we should strive even more to implement radical structural policies that enhance the competitiveness of our systems of production, the soundness of our financial sector and the efficiency of our public institutions. Whatever happens to Europe, these are policies that we should still pursue to secure a little breathing space in the short term and some possibilities for growth that is not just based on the devaluation of wages.

Following the Brexit decision, two further questions arise, in this order: in the wake of the elimination of the inner circle of great European policy makers, will the rest seek to accelerate in working towards ever closer union? And will Italy be among those with both sufficient authority and the will to achieve ever closer union?

The road towards a less intergovernmental and more community-based approach – made up of a group of eurozone countries committed to significant transfers of sovereignty in areas such as border control and immigration, foreign policy and defence, the welfare state, a genuinely shared macroeconomic policy – is a difficult road; but the UK’s opposition has often been used as a pretext to hide the lack of a will to follow it, even by countries that say they favour ever closer union, including France and Germany, both countries that could be the engine propelling Europe down this road. Will Italy combine its energies with Spain to offer a (possible) new engine?
Much depends on the government in power at the time when important decisions must be
made. A solid Italian government, led by a personality convinced of the country’s
European destiny, would have the authority to support the efforts necessary to work
towards ever closer union. But in post-Brexit Europe, with domino effects possible, there
are many challenges to rise to. Spain is still in the process of forming a new government;
in Italy there will be a domestic constitutional referendum in October, followed by
French presidential elections as well as Dutch and German elections in 2017 - all of these
tests for the pro-European parties. Difficult as the circumstances are, there is everything
to play for now. (Further coverage from Il Mulino on Brexit).

Maciej Kuziemska, Editor, Res Publica Nowa (Poland)
Polish opinion leaders rarely agree on anything, but Brexit has been almost unanimously
perceived as a worst-case scenario that heralds an era of uncertainty and confirms the
decline of the international order as we know it. Two issues seem to be the talk of the
town in Warsaw: unexpected acts of hostility against Polish migrants across British towns
and cities over the weekend, and the catastrophic consequences of Brexit for the EU.

The first issue just proves that political rhetoric is a double-edged sword; the reluctance
of the Polish government to be a part of a solution to the migrant crisis a few months ago
has backfired to the disadvantage of hundreds of thousands Poles living in the UK, now
considered scapegoats for all the misery the referendum will cause. The second issue has
triggered a whole spectrum of comments and stances, but before concrete measures are
taken by the EU leadership, these merely amounts to crystal gazing.

One thing is certain though: whatever the final outcome, the consequences of the British
referendum are a game changer not only for the future of the EU, but more importantly
for the future of deliberative democracy: politicians, opinion polling companies, media –
they all failed the test, giving way to populism and irrationality.

What will emerge in the aftermath is a smaller, weaker and more inward looking union
made up of more radical and egoistic national states. It will be a step back for European
integration, but a much-needed one. If the EU is here to stay, it has to be reformed; and
there’s no better motivation for an organization to change then a fundamental crisis that
shakes it to its very roots. Whether the EU’s leadership has the necessary determination
and proactive approach to steer us out of the crisis is another story. (Further coverage
from Res Publica Nowa on Brexit).

Daniel Gascón, Editor, Letras Libres (Spain)
Brexit was received as very bad news in Spain. The European Union is smaller as a
result. We also lose the population and expertise of a country with a great diplomatic and
democratic tradition, with global influence, considerable military and cultural power, a
special relationship with the United States and with Commonwealth countries, and an
engine of economic dynamism. The European Union and its model becomes less powerful
and attractive. Brexit means that nationalist, populist, xenophobic and protectionist
forces are reinforced.

Some pundits have argued that one of the big objectives of the EU is to contain the force
of nationalism, that dangerous passion which destroyed Europe twice over within a few
years; in contrast to which, in Britain it was nationalism which enabled the country to
resist attempts at domination from the continent. But I think there’s also another narrative - Britain as a country that has sheltered exiles from many nations, a model of freedom and parliamentarism, a country that has sometimes been a last hope... Despite many different influences, tensions and traditions, in some ways, the European Union has tried to make continental Europe a bit more like the UK.

We also lose an idea. Spain is still a very pro-European country. Belonging to the European Union was for a long time a positive aspiration: it meant overcoming a historical delay, to be accepted in the club of the great European democracies. And the UK was a very important part of that idea. Perhaps that’s one of the reasons why many Spaniards chose to disbelieve what the polls were saying, and were shocked when the Leave option won. We also have a big British population in Spain, and lots of British tourists. Brexit will have bad economic consequences for Britain, and that won’t be good for Spain.

We’ve seen the power of demagogy, and post-truth politics in action. The campaigners for Brexit didn’t explain what their plan was, if they ever really had one. It doesn’t matter that their claims were debunked by serious newspapers, because their followers don’t read them.

Brexit is bad too for the liberal and cosmopolitan order, based on agreements, trade, free movement and the possibilities of cooperation. The Leave option has been favoured by the lower classes, which will probably be the first to suffer. It is a victory of the rejection of immigrants, a victory of the idea of little England, a triumph of the fears of the old over the possibilities of young. It also warns us of the dissatisfaction of the losers of globalization, whose concerns elites may have neglected, and reminds us that nationalism grows and conquers very quickly.

To counter all this might require a bit of British phlegmaticness. And, also, we will need to fight these poisonous ideas with the accuracy and determination of someone who knows that something essential is at stake. (Further coverage from Letras Libres on Brexit).

Judith Vidal-Hall, former editor of Index on Censorship (UK) and member of the Eurozine Advisory Board

The relative optimism of prime minister David Cameron’s speech to the UK parliament today, Monday 27 June, four days after the referendum that shook the world, did little to reassure those still suffering the shock of unintended consequences at Britain’s exit from the EU. Cameron admitted:

- Markets remain unstable
- The threat of companies and banks leaving London is real
- The climate of fear and loathing surrounding the issue of migration engendered by the Leave campaign has encouraged a post-referendum xenophobia that has seen outbursts of hate speech against immigrants not seen for many years. (This has been most notable in my own area of West London where the Polish community has been happily settled and contributed significantly to the UK economy since their arrival during World War II).
- The closeness of the result – 52 per cent Leave, 48 per cent Remain – leaves the country more deeply divided than at any time in its recent history. Post-referendum statistics show striking divisions between young and old, those with higher education and those without, between the metropolitan centre that is London and much of the rest of the country and between classes.

What Cameron did not talk about was the disarray of both Conservative and Labour parties: the former has no leader to conduct negotiations with Brussels; the latter is seeing a mass exodus of the shadow cabinet and the potential departure of its leader Jeremy Corbyn, accused of a fatal lack of leadership. UK politics is divided from within and it is hard to see how either party will heal the breaches created by this referendum. In the days immediately after the referendum there was much babble of regret from those who voted Leave in a fit of pique at the “politics of fear” peddled by the Remain camp and those who did not vote at all; and a resounding silence from the leaders of both sides.

On the defeated Remain side, Cameron resigned, chancellor George Osborne went out of circulation and Corbyn’s shadow cabinet deserted in droves. The victorious Brexit camp was no less absent: Boris Johnson maintained an untypical restraint and the high-profile Leave campaigner and Conservative MP Michael Gove receded, as so often, into the background; beyond which, minor figures were hauled in to gloat or lament, there was no serious discussion. The media on the other hand had a field day, with seemingly endless speculation filling front pages and TV screens.

My own overwhelming feeling in the immediate aftermath of the result was shock and depression, compounded by the messages of commiseration arriving from friends around the world.

My conclusion? I see little ground for optimism in the months to come. The only thing we know is what we do not know. Shades of former US secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld on the notorious claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction? Yes: I believe we are now caught in the uncertainty of the conflicting claims and counterclaims – “lies, damn lies and statistics” – of the two opposing sides in this referendum, neither of whom provided the hard evidence voters needed to make rational decisions. That uncertainty will persist.

The vote was as much protest at Westminster politics as a rejection of Brussels’ bureaucracy or the EU’s “democratic deficit”. It was enabled by the promise of a referendum that had more to do with Cameron’s desire to silence the europhobes in his own party than a genuine desire to quit the EU. That it would prove to be the ejector seat that tipped the UK out of Europe was not on the cards. That it might lead to the fragmentation of the “United” Kingdom itself – both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly to remain – even less so.

**Enda O’Doherty, Editor, Dublin Review of Books**

Ireland, as the European Union state most directly, and possibly dramatically, affected by English voters’ decision to take the UK out of the European Union, has for quite some time contemplated the possible consequences for its own economics and politics of Brexit, and engaged in some contingency planning.
At the very outset of the debate, when it became clear that David Cameron would hold a referendum on EU membership – and that he might very possibly lose it – one prominent business spokesman in Ireland suggested that in the event of a Brexit, Ireland should very carefully consider leaving too, so closely connected were the two economies. This was a position, however, which attracted almost zero political support.

As economics commentator Cliff Taylor pointed out in Saturday’s Irish Times, 16 to 17 per cent of Ireland’s exports go to the UK, but in some sectors the figure is even larger: Britain takes 40 per cent of Irish food exports. If it decides that it now prefers to import more Brazilian beef, how will Ireland replace the lost markets? The fall in sterling is also another problem for Irish exporters, particularly if it is maintained over the long term, while tourism earnings could decline as British visitors find their pound buys less. On the positive side, some commentators have pointed to the possibility of some foreign direct investment now switching from the UK to Ireland (among other locations).

If there seem currently to be more fears than hopes on the economic side, the political situation is also complex. Not only Scotland but Northern Ireland voted clearly to remain. In both polities, EU membership is seen as largely a good thing and there is anger about being voted out by the europhobic English. What effect this might have on Northern Ireland’s enduring but perhaps still fragile peace remains to be seen.

In spite of significant economic worries, Britain’s decision has not been met in Ireland with unalloyed grief. If Ireland enjoys a close and usually harmonious relationship with Britain, it is still the case that Irish people are in general much more pro-European; and they are particularly hostile to that section of British opinion which promoted and delivered the Leave result. If things don’t turn out for the English quite as sweetly as the Brexiteers promised them, one might expect at least a little Schadenfreude among some sections of Irish opinion. (Further coverage from Dublin Review of Books on Brexit).

Sever Voinescu, Editor-in-chief, Dilema veche (Romania)

It was, indeed, a shock. In Romania, everybody expected the opposite outcome. For now I would say that everybody hopes for a sort of positive, smart solution to reverse the outcome – people still do not believe, or they refuse to do so, that the UK will really leave the EU. That is maybe because we are somehow accustomed not to take referenda really seriously. There are referenda that one can ignore – we had this experience in Romania in 2009 when it came to reforming our parliamentary system.

To put it bluntly: everybody is looking for a way to double-cross the referendum by maintaining the highest democratic standards. It seems impossible, but we still hope. Pushing things forward in nervousity and irritation is the worst thing that can be done under these circumstances. That is why we are amazed by the frustrated and stupid statements from Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker. Why should we rush? The personal animosity between Juncker and David Cameron means nothing to Europe right now, so if the president of the Commission cannot forget about his personal feelings, maybe he should leave the job in which, by the way, he is performing so poorly.

At another level, Brexit has brought a lot of worry to those with a pro-Europe stance in Romania. Firstly, because a feeble EU is a good environment for corruption and old-time-communist attitudes among political leaders in Romania. We have the feeling that our
transition towards a European model is not complete and the substantial progress we have already made is not irreversible at all. The institutional collapse of the European Union or the creation of another kind of EU, reserved only to some western European members, is seen as a dangerous and highly plausible scenario in Romania. We still need to see the famous transformative power of the EU at work in Romania – without which there are no reasons for optimism.

Secondly, we are concerned that the EU without the UK would be much more ready to make concessions towards Russia, and that is really frightening to us. Brexit would increase fragmentation within the EU, along with the egoism of member state representatives, thus solidifying the lack of empathy among member states – such attitudes already threaten to undermine the whole European project. If Germany or France feels much more at ease giving in to Vladimir Putin, and that is going to happen very soon, then countries like Romania would be less secure and less stable.

Pawel Marczewski, editor of Transit (Austria)
The interesting thing about Polish debates around Brexit is that commentators sympathizing with the right-wing Law and Justice government do not seem to rejoice at the result of the British referendum. Of course they ritually repeat that the British nation has made its sovereign decision, to which it is and should be fully entitled, just like any other nation in Europe. But after this half-hearted, obligatory claim comes the litany of doubts and anxieties – Poland has lost the most important ally in its struggle against the technocratic regime in Brussels, and now nothing will stand in the way of German hegemony on the continent; European federalists will try to take away the remnants of national sovereignty from countries that are smaller and poorer than the UK.

Polish right-wing reactions are therefore significantly different from the predictable voices of French or Dutch euroskeptics and nationalists who simply call for similar referenda in their home countries. Advocates of strengthening Polish national sovereignty seem to be, contrary to many comments and reports published shortly after the electoral victory of Law and Justice in October 2015, much more convinced of the importance of sustaining the European project in one form or another. This has a lot to do with the real experience of being stripped of one’s political agency. Although Polish right-wing euroskeptics like to compare Brussels with Moscow for rhetorical purposes, they surely understand (with the exception of a few loud but politically insignificant individuals) the difference between the Soviet Union and the EU. Moreover, Polish right-wingers are more aware than their French or Dutch counterparts that the weakening of the EU makes their country more vulnerable to Russian military and political pressure.

The bad news is that Brexit has revealed how large segments of societies in important European countries are very much like the Polish right-wing mainstream when it comes to the question of immigration. When countries in East Central Europe rebelled against refugee quotas, European commentators tried to make it a story about the eastern European democratic deficit and the re-emergence of the East-West division. This division may very well be in the process of re-emerging, but not because of different attitudes to migrants and refugees. As Brexit clearly shows, when it comes to xenophobia, Europe is unfortunately more united than ever.

Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-chief, New Eastern Europe (Poland)
Like elsewhere in Europe, there is no doubt that Poles have more questions than answers when it comes to Brexit. The unprecedented decision that the British have made to become the first member to leave the EU will undoubtedly have a profound impact on Poland, as well as Europe. The biggest question that Poles immediately face is what will happen to the nearly one million Poles living and working in the UK? Will they be forced to return? What effects would their return (or even the return of half of them) have on the Polish economy and unemployment? For a country of 38 million, an influx of 500,000 working adults could have a significant impact on Poland’s economy.

Another issue of concern is the hatred shown towards the Poles in the UK. Over the weekend, social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook began illustrating horrific cases of hate directed towards Poles since the referendum. Some of the more high-profile cases included a Polish cultural centre in Hammersmith being sprayed with graffiti, a Polish man and his son brutally beaten, and racist cards being delivered to Polish mailboxes with the words “No more Polish Vermin”. Moreover, countless individual accounts of harassment aimed at Poles and other immigrants dominated weekend social media activity.

Further, there is a growing sense that Europe as we know it is changing and it remains unclear to what extent Poland can play a role in a reshaped Europe; or whether it will be given a plain choice. Media reports from Monday morning drew attention to proposals by leaders of both Germany and France that demonstrate a will to accelerate European integration, creating in essence a new European super-state which includes a single currency, central bank, a single army, one immigration system and one border, among other things – in essence the United States of Europe.

If this proposal is now on the table, it is unlikely that Poland and other Visegrad states would agree to give up so much sovereignty so quickly. Hence, one could easily see in this situation the development of two European Unions, one that has a core with states like Germany and France; and one that is more on the periphery with states like Poland and Hungary.

This leads to a whole new concern for countries to the East of Poland which have declared a willingness to better integrate with Europe, namely Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. There is a growing fear that Brexit will completely shut the door on any future enlargements. If the current European Union decides to create a “super-state” within its current borders, any future accession would be extremely difficult. Such a development would leave millions of eastern Europeans who dream of a future in the EU gravely disappointed, perhaps even creating a new opening for Vladimir Putin and his own project, the Eurasian Economic Union.

Olivier Derruine, Editor, La Revue nouvelle (Belgium)
A lot of Belgians see Brexit as the final but logical stage in the development of an ambiguous relation between the UK and the EU. Belgians have always considered the UK a spoilsport in the EU, a brake on further political integration, and the most active proponent of deregulation and liberalization. While economists stress the potential costs of a Brexit for the Belgian economy (up to 12,000 jobs at risk), ruling politicians bemoan the failure of EU leaders to sell to the Brits all the achievements and the advantages of being in the Union. They also criticize the Leave campaign for their lies and for
exaggerating the shortcomings of the EU.

The Belgian prime minister wants Article 50 (triggering the departure negotiations) to be activated forthwith in order to clarify the situation and prevent further blocks in EU decision-making (for instance, with respect to the ongoing discussion of the posting of workers directive or the proposed “social triple A” initiative or the continuation of Jean-Claude Juncker’s Investment Plan for Europe, initiated in 2015). The prime minister reinforces his standpoint with the view that “the EU is not a cash machine”.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Flemish government would prefer a softer approach in order to avoid undermining the interests of Flemish companies. The minister-president of the Walloon government has set up a task force to attract companies that would leave the UK after Brexit. The nationalist Flemish party, NVA, a ruling party both at federal and Flemish levels, and the leading party in Flanders, has already stated that proposals to hold a second referendum in Scotland as a consequence of Brexit opens up new perspectives in the EU. The NVA hopes to use this case as a precedent to secede from the rest of Belgium (even though only about 15 per cent of the Flemish electorate would support that option). One may reasonably fear that Brexit will pave the way for a wave of referenda in the EU, or be exploited by different parties for different purposes.

Less than 48 hours after the outcome became known, foreign ministers from the six founding countries met in Berlin. This meeting nourishes the romantic myth that these countries can relaunch the EU. In doing so, the great diversity of the EU is neglected, especially following its enlargement to include central and eastern European countries. These countries may already feel sidelined as a result. But the response to Brexit should not be the consolidation of a two-speed Europe where some countries (those that joined the club in 2004, 2007 and 2013 and the demographically smaller countries) end up feeling excluded. Secondly, it must be recognized that any significant emotional attachment to the European project has been lacking for decades. (Further coverage from La Revue Nouvelle on Brexit).

Victor Tsilonis, Editor-in-chief, Intellectum (Greece)

Brexit was certainly an unprecedented shock, which could arguably be compared with the news of the Fukushima nuclear accident or with 9/11. However, it did not officially happen in the early hours of 24 June. Rather, it happened one week earlier, on 15 June. And it did not occur on Old Albion but at the foot of the Bernese Alps, if one believes in the butterfly effect.

Following a vote in the Swiss Council of States, the Swiss government informed the EU that it considers the Swiss application submitted in 1992 to the European Economic Community as having been withdrawn. The Swiss foreign minister Didier Burkhalter noted that application was already invalid, but this did little to change the “exit picture”.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of the Greek mass media continued to disregard the omen, so that the biggest Greek newspaper Ta Nea decided to have as its headline on Friday 24 June 2016: “On the razor’s edge: They remain in Europe 52%–48% according to the first polls”. Such was the level of shock that even the biggest Greek newspaper did not want to “believe” that the final result could be “Brexit”.
In Greece, there has long been an awareness that the British people never actually wanted to become part of the European integration project (see the clip from the 1980s British TV series *Yes, Minister* that has flooded Greek social media channels). Further critique has targeted the most obvious issues that have obstructed the unification of Europe for too long: the lack of common borders; the fact that NATO and not the EU was called upon to patrol the Aegean Sea in order to halt the recent waves of immigration; the absence of truly European democratic institutions (a crippled European Parliament and a weak Commission); the non-implementation of common economic policies, etc. In short, Greek people believe that the refugee crisis was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Right now, everyone believes that George Soros’s *prophecy* will most likely come true: that “the disintegration of the EU is practically irreversible”. However, there is still some hope that such a great crisis could lead not to a Third World War but to Europe’s unification via the establishment of truly democratic European institutions, common borders, a common defence policy/army and a common economy. But who can pull that off? No one on the political scene right now seems capable of accomplishing this feat.

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