

What has the EU ever done for us anyway?

by rpinto_anglodeutsch - Thursday, June 23, 2016

<http://anglodeutsch.eu/what-has-the-eu-ever-done-for-us/>

Britons will be voting on the EU referendum tomorrow. The vote will determine Brexit whether Brexit will happen or not. This is actually Britain's second great Brexit debate, the first being the referendum of 1975, which the Remain side won comfortably. There is a different scenario now and the vote could go either way on the 23 June 2016. In this divisive and intemperate debate about whether to Remain or Leave, the emphasis has been on the negative. Fear is the name of the game: if we stay/leave, the UK will retain/lose x, therefore, vote to leave/remain. It is rare to read a positive set of reasons which connects up with people are interested in the things that affect our day-to-day lives.

This is the focus of this article. This one is written from the perspective of a citizen who happens to be British, has a German partner and has friends and family scattered all over Europe. It is the view of someone who has created a business in another EU country and who is active in EU nations as well as EU Candidate Countries and other nations.

The thing I love most of all is the freedom of movement of people. It is the greatest gift to be able to travel, work, live, study, au pair, retire, etc. wherever we like, whenever we like, as often as we like in any of 28 countries. This is the epitome of freedom and we lucky enough to have it.

If the climate in one country does not suit you, go to another. If the costs of living, such as housing, are too high, go somewhere else. If you cannot find a job in one place, try somewhere else. Britain is booming today but it might not tomorrow; this is when Britons will begin to appreciate it. Remember Norman Tebbit's "[on your bike](#) Speech? If you can move freely within one country, to be able to do so in 28 / 508 million people is absolutely amazing.

And the beauty of it all, is that no one has the right to question or hinder you. You can study or work abroad, alone or taking your family, without applying for visas or other waiting at the borders for hours, paying any fees or being dependent on any bureaucrat's whims. Once the freedom of movement of people is lost, life will never be the same again.

Not only that, the EU directives mean that I cannot be discriminated in any of the EU 28 countries on the basis of nationality, language, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. This is priceless within the 28 countries, as well as between them all. This makes us the most advanced region in the planet – by far.

Despite the fears being put about by the Leave Campaign, only 5% of the 508 million EU citizens take-up the freedom of movement of people. Most people are quite happy to live where they are, but use the other benefits of the EU. What are those?

I love the fact that I can go on holiday whenever I like, wherever I like. I take for granted the fact that I can book a journey and set-off without delays due to visa requirements, border controls and other factors which transfer power from me, as a citizen, to others. The bureaucrats in 28 countries all have to apply

the same rules to everyone from the EU. This increases transparency and freedom.

It also makes for cheaper, faster, more efficient travel. And since there is a group of 28 countries involved, it is much harder for telecom operators, travel agencies, airlines, commercial banks, etc. to divide and conquer customers, ripping us off by imposing the highest prices they can for no reason.

I now pay low mobile roaming charges and in 2017, I shall pay none because of the EU's competition policy. I have an EU wide airline policy to ensure that I am compensated if my plane is unreasonably delayed, something that I have made use of. I can buy anything I like in other EU nations or via the internet and still have my consumer rights protected, regardless of where I live or which country I purchased something in – and I do not need to return to that country in order to make a claim. This is a great, even though I do not even think about it.

I particularly like the fact that if I fall ill in any of the EU countries, I shall be treated without having first bought a private insurance policy, thus saving me money, time and hassle. That is great when I am on business. When I am on holiday, especially with my family, this is wonderful. I don't think about it anymore, but it is a saving and it is very welcome. Britons cannot benefit from this yet begrudge others of the same rights in Britain. Ask the British pensions living in Spain and France.

I am only too aware that the Eurozone, comprising 19 countries, is unfinished business, as the situation in Greece and other countries continues to show. On the other hand, even more countries are joining over time, which shows that others do not share the British newspapers' Euroscepticism. They keep pronouncing the Euro dead: read the archives of any of the top journalists of the Mail, Sun and Telegraph and you will see how many times the Euro has been written off since 2007. Yet it is still here and is the world's second reserve currency, not Sterling. Those journalists should occasionally re-read their previous articles and learn to a bit of humility.

I love the fact that I do not have to pay a provision to exchange money every time I go to another country and to pay again to change it back if I do not want have tons of useless coins and notes in a box somewhere. I transfer money between Germany and other countries freely or for a pittance, yet still pay through my nose to transfer money to and from Britain.

I can, if I wished to, buy a holiday / retirement home in any place I like, etc. If I fall ill and my health system forces me to wait years for an operation, I can just go to another EU country that can do it faster; it is up to the health systems to sort out the payment amongst themselves. I get treated faster and my quality of life improves immeasurably. I am empowered by the EU's capacity to make this happen for 508 million citizens. Bureaucracies such as restrictive health systems lose. I gain.

I know my children can study anywhere they choose to at primary, secondary and university level. Mobility is increasing and Europe will be their oyster in terms of studying, living and working. Should they, like me, wish get married to someone from another European country, I know their spouse will not be disadvantaged and they can live and work where ever they desire. Families will not be split.

The EU regulations are often vilified. But the rights that they assign over 28 countries mean that my children will not be discriminated. Their health and safety will be protected. They will also have at least 1 day off a week, 20 minutes break if they work more than 6 hours, 11 hours' rest from work each day, not

work more than 48 hours per week if they don't want to, get at least 4 weeks' paid holiday a year, etc. They will get the minimum package across all 28 countries: this means that employers across 28 nations have the same basis deal and they cannot screw the employees in a race to the bottom. Why would anyone, other than unscrupulous employers or politicians, turn down a package that upholds human dignity and protects health and well-being?

There are other things that I love but which are harder to pin down.

I know the mankind is flirting with disaster unless we do something about climate change. 28 countries doing nothing or perhaps something about climate change is not the same as all EU doing it together: working in concert is the only way to tackled the "[tragedy of the commons](#)" across the whole of Europe. This applies to the water I drink, the rivers and beaches I enjoy, the air I breathe and the birds, animals and habitats that I interact with and depend upon. I know that Britain did not take these things all that seriously until it joined in 1973 but that the EU rules apply to all: this is the reason why fish stocks are being preserved and renewed and is the reason why British beaches have become clean. I am glad the EU steps-in because I know for sure that some countries would otherwise just ignore environmental issues. Not all government care equally about what we leave behind for future generations and one that does today may change its mind tomorrow.

But it also applies to other abstract issues. I remain stricken by Europe and NATO's inability to deal with the collapse of the former Yugoslav Republic. The war may be over, but there are still issues festering in parts of the Balkans and now, the situation in Ukraine/Russia threatens to spill into the rest of Europe.

I have lived through a civil war and I am only too aware of its consequences, even if my fellow Britons may not be. So I say this: Britain may be an island but it is not immune to what happens beyond its coastline. Two World Wars should make that abundantly clear. Even when Britain won, Britain lost big time in people, trade, wealth, empire and much more. I would rather live with the EU's flaws and cost (as a German tax payer I contribute more than any other nation) than with the unquantifiable cost of possible future conflicts in Europe.

Criminal and terrorist activities are nothing new to Britain (I remember plenty about the IRA's previous campaigns), Germany and the rest of Europe, though the nature and origin have changed over time. A terrorist is a terrorist is a terrorist regardless of nationality, race, religion or gender. My safety is enhanced when 28 nations share information, coordinate activities and act in unison. Going it alone is not my view of how to deal with a globalising world that brings new threats to every nation and every doorstep. If asylum seekers can find their way into Britain, so can a determined criminal or a terrorist, even if Britain does not have open borders as the Leave campaign wrongly claims.

Working in concert, working with 27 other EU nations, carries a lot more weight in terms of health, environment, defence, counter terrorism, international relations, trade, crime prevention, fraud prevention, consumer protection, research and development, education, etc. etc. etc.

This is a small sub-set of the benefits of being in the EU, as I see them.

So, what has the EU ever done for Britons? Plenty since 1973, I would say.

Is it worth paying less than 1% of GDP into the EU budget for and pooling parts of our sovereignty with the EU? Yup! Every single time.

Is the EU, perfect? Hardly. But neither is the UK now, let alone when it is on its own.

Would I want to give up the above on the 23 June 2016? The answer is obvious.

So the question to my fellow Britons who are undecided is: why would you want to?

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