

TOPIC GUIDE: EU REFERENDUM 2016

"THE UK SHOULD LEAVE THE EU"**PUBLISHED: 10 MAY 2016****AUTHOR: NADIA BUTT & JUSTINE BRIAN**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In February 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that on June 23, the UK will vote on a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU), describing it as "one of the biggest decisions in our lifetimes" [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. There are many strands to the debate about the UK's membership of the EU including: the strength or weakness of the UK's economy inside or outside of the 'common market'; the issue of political sovereignty - the country's control over its laws, borders and economy; and whether without a union of European nation states, we run the risk of a repeat of the bloody history of Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For many arguing to remain in the EU, the wider consequences of a 'Brexit' are of concern for the EU project as a whole, with Greece's former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis claiming that, "the EU's very existence depends on Britain staying in" [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But those who believe that the UK should leave the EU claim the benefits of continued membership, both for the UK and European nations as a whole, are significantly outweighed by the undemocratic nature of the European Union, arguing that "the EU model is the antithesis (of democracy): centralising decision-taking in the hands of an unaccountable technocratic elite" [Ref: [Spectator](#)]. So, is the EU anti-democratic and a threat to the UK's sovereignty? Or are our nation's interests best served as part of the broader European project with our role in Europe allowing us to be, "part of a much bigger entity with far-reaching international influence" [Ref: [Observer](#)]?

For further reading use the menu bar on the right hand side.

DEBATE IN CONTEXT

This section provides a summary of the key issues in the debate, set in the context of recent discussions and the competing positions that have been adopted.

The European project: keeping the peace

The UK joined the forerunner of the European Union, the European Economic Community (EEC), in 1973, a decision later endorsed by referendum in 1975 [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. The EEC was forged in the aftermath of two world wars, and an influential argument for those who want to remain in the EU is that "the only sustained period of peace in modern European history directly coincides with the EU's

creation” [Ref: **New Statesman**]. The belief that the EU provides a bulwark against European nationalist antagonisms underwrites many of its advocates’ arguments. Euroscepticism, they argue, is a means to legitimate ‘populist’ right-wing politicians promoting nationalistic ideas against fellow European nations. As one commentator asserts, “together we are more than the sum of our parts” [Ref: **Guardian**]. But some are not convinced about the voracity of claims about European peace and stability, referencing the 1990’s war in the former Yugoslavia, as well as the recent events in Ukraine, and argue that factors outside of the EU have kept the peace, with peace within Europe becoming “fragile, as the euro unleashes competitive pressures that pit national economies against one another” [Ref: **University of Cambridge**]. Others speak positively of the EU as a guarantor of universal “social rights” [Ref: **Left Foot Forward**], with supporters suggesting that the EU’s treatment of human rights is: “second to none” [Ref: **Observer**].

Investment, trade and power

For those in favour of the UK’s continued membership of the EU, the combination of a common market and a transnational form of government means that, “in the political arenas like the G8 and G20, Britain has far greater heft because we are alongside other EU nations” [Ref: **Evening Standard**]. Moreover, they maintain that the UK reaps many benefits from being part of the world’s largest economic bloc, and through collective trade deals between the EU and other world powers - with no tariffs on imports and exports between EU members [Ref: **The Week**]. The economic debate is polarised – with advocates of Brexit arguing that the UK could negotiate its own trade deal with the EU, as other nations have, relieving the UK from its current responsibilities to the EU and “costly, unnecessary and undesirable” EU regulation [Ref: **Telegraph**]. Whilst, those who wish to remain remind us that any agreement is hypothetical, and Brexit would be taking a leap into the unknown, which might “discourage investment, especially foreign direct investment, of which Britain is the biggest net recipient in the EU” [Ref: **Economist**]. Much criticism of the European Union has focused on its attempts to maintain financial stability and the credibility of the euro on international markets, in the light of the 2008 Eurozone crisis [Ref: **BBC News**]. The Eurozone is an economic and monetary union of 17 member states, who share the common currency of the Euro under strict fiscal rules created by Eurozone leaders. Although the UK is not part of the Eurozone, some argue the political consequence of these fiscal rules highlight the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of the EU more broadly. They say that Brussels can directly intervene in national economies [Ref: **Guardian**], such as Greece in 2015, for the benefit of a European elite who “care only about keeping their political project alive, regardless of how those who must deal with the consequences are affected.” [Ref: **Salon**]

A democratic deficit?

The European Parliament is an elected institution of the EU, but with much of EU legislation decided by the unelected European Commission, those in favour of Brexit argue that the EU lacks democratic legitimacy, a position outlined by a German official who said that, “the weakness of the system is ... about legitimacy” [Ref: **Economist**]. Those critical of the EU project argue that it has, “taken decision-making away from national parliaments. On virtually everything that matters, from the economy to immigration, decisions are made elsewhere”, and that it operates in, “a protected sphere, safe from the demands of voters and their representatives” [Ref: **Telegraph**], a view which is highlighted by a Pew Research poll which shows that majorities in seven European countries (the UK included) don’t think their voice counts in the EU [Ref: **Pew Research**]. Perhaps more fundamentally, opponents go on to highlight that the EU prohibits the UK from applying its own principles of law, and is profoundly undemocratic as a result [Ref: **Telegraph**], with one commentator observing that, “nothing... should ever override the right of the demos to choose who governs them and to shape through public debate the political make-up of their ruling institutions” [Ref: **spiked**]. Entwined with the issue of legal and democratic sovereignty, the free movement of peoples is a key topic within the discussion, with opinion divided as to whether it is good for the UK or not. Approximately 3.3 million

EU nationals are currently living in the UK [Ref: [BBC News](#)], and critics of this aspect of the EU, argue that membership means that the UK cannot control migration from EU member states, and that this has created, “huge pressure on wages, the NHS and other public services” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)], whilst others counter that a shortage of skilled workers would be created by leaving the EU, as this might deter European workers from coming here. Moreover, in such an integrated, globalised world with a “network of international treaties and obligations”, supporters of the EU have questioned whether national sovereignty can ever be restored in the way that those in favour of Brexit suggest [Ref: [Economist](#)]. Notwithstanding these concerns, advocates of the UK remaining in the EU argue that despite its flaws, we should stay in, as: “The growth of euroscepticism across Europe means the elites won’t be able to bamboozle the people into agreeing more transfers of power to Brussels, as they have done in the past” [Ref: [Independent](#)]. So what are the key issues at stake with the UK’s membership of the European Union? Is a loss of national sovereignty and economic self-governance too high a price to pay? Or is it the case that: “There are no good alternatives to membership. We should stay in the EU and put our energy into reforming it” [Ref: [Independent](#)]?

ESSENTIAL READING

It is crucial for debaters to have read the articles in this section, which provide essential information and arguments for and against the debate motion. Students will be expected to have additional evidence and examples derived from independent research, but they can expect to be criticised if they lack a basic familiarity with the issues raised in the essential reading.

The UK’s EU referendum: All you need to know [🔗](#)

BBC News 18 April 2016

Reality check: the FT dissects pro and anti-Brexit claims [🔗](#)

Chris Giles **Financial Times** 11 April 2016

FOR

I resigned so I could tell the truth about Brexit – and what it will cost Britain to stay [🔗](#)

John Longworth **Guardian** 11 April 2016

The Undemocratic EU Explained – It Will Never Change [🔗](#)

Matthew Ellery **Huffington Post** 21 March 2016

There is only one way to get the change we want – vote to leave the EU [🔗](#)

Boris Johnson **Telegraph** 16 March 2016

Obama’s wrong. Americans should back Brexit – and so should you [🔗](#)

Irwin Stelzer **Spectator** 12 March 2016

Love democracy? Then leave the EU [🔗](#)

Brendan O’Neill **spiked** 22 February 2016

AGAINST

Why Brexit would be nothing less than an act of political arson [🔗](#)

David Miliband **Guardian** 11 April 2016

Why we must save the EU [🔗](#)

Yanis Varoufakis **Guardian** 5 April 2016

Britain’s choice: economic security with the EU, or a leap into the dark [🔗](#)

David Cameron **Telegraph** 4 April 2016

Leaving the EU would be a self-defeating dereliction of duty and history [🔗](#)

Tristram Hunt **New Statesman** 25 March 2016

The City has too much to lose and nothing to gain from leaving the EU [🔗](#)

Simon Nixon **The Times** 18 February 2016

IN DEPTH

The Brexit delusion [↗](#)

Economist 27 February 2016

The left wing case for leaving the EU [↗](#)

John King **New Statesman** 11 June 2015

KEY TERMS

Definitions of key concepts that are crucial for understanding the topic. Students should be familiar with these terms and the different ways in which they are used and interpreted and should be prepared to explain their significance.

Brexit [↗](#)

Democratic deficit [↗](#)

Europhile [↗](#)

Eurosceptic [↗](#)

Lisbon Treaty [↗](#)

Referendum [↗](#)

Single Market [↗](#)

Sovereignty [↗](#)

BACKGROUNDEERS

Useful websites and materials that provide a good starting point for research.

The Spectator Debate: Should Britain Leave the EU? [↗](#)

Spectator 28 April 2016

A plague on both their houses: This pitiful EU referendum 'debate' is an affront to voters [↗](#)

Michael Toner **International Business Times** 14 April 2016

The Brexit Conundrum [↗](#)

Maurizio Zanardi **New Statesman** 12 April 2016

Reality Check: How much does the EU Budget cost the UK? [↗](#)

BBC News 5 April 2016

A Brexit vote may be the only way to get real EU reform [↗](#)

Liam Halligan **Telegraph** 2 April 2016

EU referendum: the pros and cons of Britain voting to leave Europe [↗](#)

The Week 1 April 2016

EU Referendum Debate [↗](#)

Guardian 15 March 2016

Project Fear looks more like mafia blackmail [↗](#)

Melanie Phillips **The Times** 26 February 2016

Britain outside the EU would stand tall as a free and prosperous nation [↗](#)

Nigel Lawson **Telegraph** 17 February 2016

How to Make a Brexit? [↗](#)

BBC Radio 4 5 January 2016

Can the EU keep the peace in Europe? Not a chance. [↗](#)

Chris Bickerton **University of Cambridge** 28 October 2015

Europe wants Greece to suffer: The truth about the never-ending financial crisis [↗](#)

David Dayen **Salon** 23 June 2015

A fragile rebound for the EU's image [↗](#)

Pew Research 12 May 2014

Why Britain should stay in the EU [↗](#)

Hugo Dixon **Independent** 25 March 2014

The EU: should Britain be in or out? [↗](#)

Observer 18 January 2014

Europe is slowly strangling the life out of national democracy [↗](#)

Peter Osborne **Telegraph** 1 January 2014

For Britain to leave the EU would be economic suicide [↗](#)

Tony Blair **Evening Standard** 9 September 2013

The Eurozone crisis explained [↗](#)

BBC News 19 June 2012

Four reasons Britain should stay in the EU [↗](#)

Left Foot Forward 12 June 2012

An ever deeper democratic deficit [↗](#)

Economist 24 May 2012

Ed Miliband, you stoke this anti-Europe fire at your peril [↗](#)

Gaby Hinsliff **Guardian** 21 May 2012

Is Britain still a sovereign state? [↗](#)

Phillip Johnston **Telegraph** 17 September 2009

1975: the UK embraces Europe in a referendum [↗](#)

BBC 'On this day'

ORGANISATIONS

Links to organisations, campaign groups and official bodies who are referenced within the Topic Guide or which will be of use in providing additional research information.

Britain Stronger in Europe [↗](#)

European Commission [↗](#)

European Union [↗](#)

Vote Leave [↗](#)

IN THE NEWS

Relevant recent news stories from a variety of sources, which ensure students have an up to date awareness of the state of the debate.

Devastating MORI poll shows Europe's peoples share British rage over EU [↗](#)

Telegraph 10 May 2016

Brexit will aid the West's enemies and leave Britain 'dangerously weakened', warn defence chiefs [↗](#)

Daily Mail 10 May 2016

Eurozone crisis 'pushing migrants to UK' [↗](#)

BBC News 13 April 2016

EU referendum: 250 business leaders back exit, say campaigners [↗](#)

BBC News 26 March 2016

EU referendum: Cameron sets June date for UK vote [↗](#)

BBC News 20 February 2016

Nearly two million EU workers in Britain, new figures show [↗](#)

Telegraph 13 May 2015

Change the EU from within, urges manufacturing [↗](#)

Guardian 3 July 2014

Officials forced to approve EU mandates against their will, says former advisor [↗](#)

Telegraph 30 June 2014

Anti EU parties enjoy election success [↗](#)

Financial Times 26 May 2014

UK could be plunged into crisis if it left the EU [↗](#)

Telegraph 16 May 2014

Cameron: "The EU is not working, and we will change it" [↗](#)

Telegraph 15 March 2014

Britons back EU membership over leaving [↗](#)

Reuters 11 March 2014

Italy crisis: Silvio Berlusconi resigns as PM [↗](#)

BBC News 13 November 2011

Eurozone crisis: Greek PM George Papandreou to resign [↗](#)

Guardian 6 November 2011

AUDIO/VISUAL

The Spectator Debate: Should Britain Leave the EU? [↗](#)

Spectator 28 April 2016

EU Referendum Debate [↗](#)

Guardian 15 March 2016

How to Make a Brexit? [↗](#)

BBC Radio 4 5 January 2016

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