

## Britain's Relationship with the European Union

### Question:

The UK will vote on whether to remain in the European Union on 23/6/2016. This referendum comes at a critical time for the EU, which is still suffering from the economic crisis that began in 2008. Questions arose about the possibility of the EU's survival if Britain pulls out, and the possibility to have a future, regardless of the referendum's result, questions are also raised in the United Kingdom over Britain's role in the world, because of the numerous consequences of the referendum. What is expected from this referendum? Jazak Allah Khair.

### Answer:

To highlight what may be expected we need to review how the Union formed and the position of Britain towards it:

1. The roots of the formation of the European Union began after the Second World War in 1945, represented by the desire to unite Europe so that there will be no more wars in the continent. The European continent had a long history of wars. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the time, supported this idea, and suggested *"to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe."* At that time, after the devastation post World War II, Britain did not ponder this idea, about the European Union seriously, it did not even perceive it as possible. When the Coal and Steel Corporation was established in 1951, and the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, Britain did not join it, it was afraid that a united Europe will threaten the British authority, thus it took a wait-and-see approach to see if the Union would survive. This is on the one hand, while on the other hand, by not joining, Britain led to the weakening of the Union since the beginning, due to the fact that a major country in Europe are not a part of the Union. One of the original architects of the Union, Frenchman Jean Monnet said, "I never understood why the British did not join. I came to the conclusion that it must have been because it was the price of victory - the illusion that you could maintain what you had, without change." (BBC, 01/04/2014)

2. By 1960 the EU had stabilized, and British politicians realized that their presence outside the European Union meant that they have no influence over it. British politicians realized that they need to be at Europe's head table in order to influence it, and to make sure they are not united enough to make Britain weak and insignificant. Therefore in 1961 it applied to join the Union but was denied entry - twice - by the French President Charles de Gaulle, as he sought to distance Britain from Europe, because he understood Britain's strategy was to prevent the unification of Europe. He accused Britain of "deep animosity" to the European entity. But de Gaulle resigned as French president in 1969, and died one year later. His successor George Pompidou met with the British Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1971, and after lengthy negotiations, Britain was given membership of the European Union.

3. Afterwards Britain immediately began to call for renegotiation, during the reign of the Conservative Party, the terms of Britain's accession to the Union, in an attempt to undermine the Union... Thus when the Labour Party came to power in 1974, its leadership used the "renegotiation" card to threaten the leaders of the European Union, because it asked to show the renegotiation terms to the public for a referendum. Then the West Germany leader Helmut Schmidt and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson reached a deal to keep Britain in the European Union, in turn Schmidt had to show that some concessions were made by him

to show that the British government has achieved its goal of re-negotiation. The three main parties in Britain carried out a full campaign to keep Britain in the European Union; and after the referendum in 1975, 67% of voters voted in favor of remaining in the Union, which at that time was just a free trade zone. By 1980, Union leaders were focused on increased integration in the Union, and the orientation of Europe towards a federation and a single currency, the EU was moving toward a political union and a single market, making Britain just another integrated state in Europe like Belgium! This also meant that Britain gives up some of its sovereignty, authority and parliamentary laws to the European Parliament in Brussels. Despite the support of Margaret Thatcher for Europe at the beginning, but in 1988 she gave a speech in Bruges, in Belgium, showing the British position, she rejected "that a major European state exercising a new dominance from Brussels." This led to a split in the Conservative Party, which still exists to this day, which ultimately led to her downfall, and so Britain had failed to keep the European Union divided, and in the end it signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, this led to a broad transfer of power to the new European Union, whereas Britain secured the exit option from the unified currency.

4. During the time of Margaret Thatcher's government from 1979 to 1990, the differences greatly deepened between Conservative Party politicians and the political class. Several ministers resigned, including Geoffrey Howe, the then Deputy Prime Minister... and while there was no opposition to the European Union in 1971, the opposition grew due to politicians' view that Britain is giving up a lot of power to Europe. Professor Bogdanor, an expert in British history, at King's College London, said, "Europe has been a toxic issue in British politics not just because it caused division between parties, "but also deep divisions within the parties. Some might argue that the fundamental conflict in post-war British politics is not so much between left and right as between those who believe that Britain's future lies with Europe and those who believe it does not." ([BBC](#), 01/04/2014)

5. There were two issues that divided the politicians and much of the British public; one was the issue of sovereignty, and the other being nationalism. The accession to the European Union meant the transfer of much of the authority to the European Union institutions. This included many laws to be drawn in Brussels, instead of the British Parliament. This contradicts the notion of a nation-state, because a symbol of independence is when a secular state legislates its own laws and policies... and so with the increased of EU integration, the United Kingdom would lost more powers, which caused many rifts among the political class. The EU is also an organization that transcends national boundaries, which defies British history and British identity, being an English independent state. These issues caused large splits and was a major problem for successive governments in the use of the European Union for their own interests. The establishment of the Independence Party in the United Kingdom on the issue of anti-Europe led to its great support by the British people, causing further divisions within the Conservative Party that led to further opposition among the people to the EU. The Independence Party won seats in the European Parliament, and used this position to challenge and undermine it. Moreover, the party's popularity was confirmed in the General Election of 2015 when it ranked third in the general election, but the British electoral system that decides that the first winner takes office, is what kept it out of power at the end of the day.

6. But since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, Britain clashed with the EU on many issues, the British Prime Minister David Cameron has clashed with Europe over plans to impose a tax on banks, and the restriction of the financial sector in London... In March 2015, the UK won the lawsuit against the European Central Bank in the European Court of Justice, the ECB attempted to transfer the role of clearing the euro zone transactions within the EU, such a move would have allowed to exclude London, leaving Paris and Frankfurt as more attractive financial centers, which would weaken the economic situation in Britain. David Cameron used the threat to leave the European Union as a means to negotiate better terms with European Union officials, and if that did not work, he also threatened them with a referendum on leaving the Union.

7. For Britain, a unified European Union is a threat to its strength, keeping it divided has been its permanent goal. Britain on the one hand wants to keep the European Union divided, and on the other hand, wants to use it for its own interests in international issues. It used every opportunity to undermine the European Union, from the moment of accession, and then immediately called for re-negotiations, which in turn led to the referendum. It called for a single market in the European Union and then stood against it... and it criticized the creation of a European super state because it undermines its sovereignty... and Britain called for the unity of Europe and then pulled out of joining the euro zone... Thus Britain sought every opportunity to dismantle the European Union and keep it weak, but it realized since the early days of the European Union that it should be in the Union in order to influence it, its political needs to stay within the European Union. Thus it joined the union to achieve this goal after realizing that it cannot be achieved from the outside. De Gaulle understood Britain's goal, and kept Britain outside the Union, but eventually it was allowed to join!

8. Britain also benefits economically from the European Union, this benefit, its corporations and wealthy elite, Britain's economy is dominated by services; the main being the financial services. Britain produces a few goods, but it depends on financial services for income, and capital and foreign exchange. The unified EU market means that Britain could produce without trade restrictions to all of Europe, which benefits big companies and the rich elite. So leaving the EU will make it lose this benefit and lead to political problems in the country. Also, leaving the European Union means that Britain will stop taking laws or decisions issued by the European Union, because the EU is the main trading partner for Britain, so leaving the Union when it is a European country weakens its position in Europe... This is also the situation that will need to challenge the EU from the outside and this weakens its influence on the Union. Its influence from the inside is stronger and more effective.

9. Based on the above we can be sum up Britain's relationship with the union and what is expected from the referendum as follows:

a. Britain always wanted to weaken the European unity, and worked from within the European Union to achieve this.

b. Accordingly, Britain views the European Union from the angle of its benefit, and is working to modify it for its advantage, angering France and Germany many times.

c. There is some damage affecting Britain as a result of its presence in the European Union: it loses sovereignty and authority; but it sees this as the price it needs to pay to continue to influence it. And this caused divisions among politicians, elites and the British people, which made the British government demand the restoration of some of the authorities by threatening to conduct a public referendum on leaving the European Union.

d. For these reasons, it is not expected that Britain would leave the European Union, it is likely that they would vote in favor of the status quo.

This is what is most likely to happen in this matter, however, Britain masters the art of extortion, and therefore it is not unlikely that it extends the date of the referendum if its interests require, or make the results inconclusive, so that there is room for give and take to further blackmail the European Union to make concessions... And it is expected that Britain will continue to deceive the European Union until someone within the Union realizes its truth and kicks it out of the Union, without being blackmailed by the referendum card!

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