



'FOOD FOR THOUGHT' SEMINAR
'What should Europe expect from the UK referendum?'
11 November 2015

Chair: Paulo RANGEL MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group, Chairman of the EIN
Speakers: Charles TANNOCK MEP, ECR
Richard CORBETT MEP, S&D
Conclusions: David McALLISTER MEP, EPP

Paulo Rangel

The letter of Cameron to the President of the Council Donald Tusk came right on time for the Food for Thought debate about *'What should Europe expect from the UK referendum?'*.

P. Rangel introduced the speakers and thanked them for their participation to this discussion between different MEPs from different European political parties.

Charles Tannock

For him, there is no secret or new element in this letter. The main areas of concern are migration and Schengen, national parliament role and subsidiarity, sovereignty and competitiveness. He called Cameron's proposals for reform "symbolic things". Protecting the City and the British economy is also at stake and developing the energy union and the digital single market are part of his requirements. Cameron explained that no obligation should in any ways compromise the British economy.

For C. Tannock, Migration is the N°1 issue. UKIP will try to use it during the campaign as their most important argument. The control of the British borders is the N°1 topic of interest for the British people and this is "food for EU sceptics".

He told the audience that "only 30% of Conservative MPs will campaign for an out of the EU".

On the first hand, he gave example of risks of an out of the EU. To his point of view, a Brexit would encourage other countries to ask as well for a referendum or for new reforms. Plus, the role of Britain will lose in its importance in external relations.

On the other hand, it is important to tell the UK population that there is a lot of positive aspects of being part of the EU for UK. "We have to show them that there is a number of EU programmes from which we benefit". For example, the single market is vital for the UK. This is a myth that the UK is being prevented to trade with China or with Japan because of the EU.

This week, the polls in the UK are really close: 51% in favour of staying in the EU and 49% against. C. Tannock does not want to have a shorter gap between the votes against and in

favour. It is necessary to have a clear majority in favour of the EU because otherwise the voice of the losers will remain in importance even after the final vote.

Richard Corbett

R. Corbett asked first why there is this referendum. He recalled that Cameron political party is divided on this issue and that this is an election promise.

Then, he was wondering what reforms to ask for. Cameron has to find something "between the trivial and the impossible" and this is "a question of symbolic and substantial". Cameron has of course to safeguard the UK from a "super centralised state".

Cameron is asking for ending "Britain's obligation to work towards an **"ever closer union"** as set out in the Treaty". Such a "reform", changing wording in the declaratory preamble of the EU treaty which has no direct legal effect, would be purely symbolic. In any case, the full text is "an ever-closer union among the peoples [not the states] of Europe in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity" – the principle that the EU should act in as decentralised a way as possible.

This clause was pushed for by the last Conservative government when negotiating the Maastricht Treaty. Amending it now would require a treaty change that is unlikely to be agreed, and is anyway totally unnecessary. Concerns about too much centralisation in the Union have already been addressed in the binding legal requirements, set out in Articles 4 and 5 of the treaty itself rather than in the declaratory preamble (principle of conferred powers, principle of subsidiarity, and principle of proportionality).

Furthermore, this issue was already semi-resolved at the European Council in June 2014 which noted that the concept of ever closer union allows for different paths of integration for different countries, allowing those that want to deepen integration to move ahead, while respecting the wish of those who do not want to deepen any further." These legal requirements demonstrate that the idea of a centralised Union replacing Europe's member countries is a myth.

Strengthening the role of national parliaments is a key idea of UK Prime Minister David Cameron and figures among the priorities for EU reform in his letter to Donald Tusk. Mr Cameron suggests strengthening the procedure of the yellow card whereby national parliaments can object to European Commission proposals on the ground that they go beyond the principle of subsidiary.

The "yellow card" procedure has been triggered only twice in the five years of its existence. The thing is that proposals can be killed off anyway later in the procedure, in the EU Council, where national ministers essentially have a 'red card' – nothing gets through if a minority of them combine to reject it.

Mr Cameron's red card is proposing to reinforce a little-used procedure that simply duplicates an easier option to block proposals later on.

furthermore, the suggestion of creating a 'red card' mechanism that would allow groups of parliaments to effectively veto new EU proposals is likely to create more problems than it would solve and could actively work against the UK's interests by preventing the liberalisation of Europe's services sector and reforms aimed at boosting competitiveness

The government has long argued that the eurozone needs further integration and that it might become a hard core within the EU, marginalising **non-euro countries**.

In fact, although the countries that share a common currency do need to do more together to manage that situation, the bulk of what the EU does remains at the level of the whole Union: the single market and the legislation that sets the common rules for that market, trade, research & development programmes, foreign policy, police & justice cooperation, the Erasmus student exchange programme, agriculture, fisheries and so on. Britain will only be on the margins if it marginalises itself.

The area where there *is* arguably a danger that the eurozone might act as a cohesive caucus within the wider EU is in the field of financial sector regulation. But in this area, the EU has already agreed to have a “double majority” rule, where a majority of both members and non-members of the eurozone is required to agree any new rules.

Concerning the **migration issue** and the proposition of Cameron that “People coming to Britain from the EU must live here and contribute for four years before they qualify for in-work benefits or social housing”, he explained that most of the migrants in UK are coming from outside the EU. Secondly, he recalled the financial benefits of EU migrants who pay one third more in taxes than they take out in benefits and services

Mr Corbett defended the EU **competitiveness** and explained that the EU is constantly reforming with Capital market, Digital market, Common fisheries, Refit program and other reforms. Cameron needs to have something to sell to the UK people and the eurosceptics. Those reforms should be enough to prove EU competitiveness. Finally, he recommended the audience to download his app called “Doorstep EU” summarizing the main arguments against a Brexit.

Q&A

Mr Malinov, asked the speakers about the nature for the migrants and the fact that most of the Bulgarian migrants that are coming to UK are in fact highly educated workers. For him, the EU migration could benefit to the UK economy.

Mr Tannock

The conservative MEP answered by saying that for the British this has always been the British first. That means that the population talks about migration but not about EU. The only thing of importance is the open door policy regarding the migrants and that this is a burden for UK. They are not talking about the doctors or about the highly educated migration.

Mr Corbett

He explained that the Labour party has decided to campaign unconditionally to stay in the EU whatever Mr Cameron's reforms would be. The referendum is not about saying yes or no to Cameron reforms; it is about a much more important issue. But it will be tough because the anti-EU are prepared to this campaign for years and they have arguments and money to defend their position. It is not going to be easy.

Mr Schöpflin has begun his intervention by recalling the 1975 referendum. For him, this is a highly emotional issue. But this is merely an English problem that could become a Scottish issue, especially if UK decides to leave the EU.

Mr Rangel claimed that the EPP position is to defend a “Bremain”. He asked the two speakers to explain the difference of treatment between Commonwealth and EU migrants.

Mr Corbett explained that Commonwealth citizens living in UK are allowed to vote for the referendum and EU citizens are not.

Mr Tannock told that this difference is the result of a "strange British electoral system".

This could also bring the question of the minimum age of voting. The polls indicated that this is merely the elder voters that are in favour of leaving the EU. So, that could be a good thing to give a right to vote from 16 years old.

Mr McAllister thanked the speakers for this balance debate between different European political parties. This is only the beginning of the debate and the letter will be a base for the December Council dedicated to this issue of the UK referendum.

He also explained the importance of the EPP role to explain why UK has to stay in the EU.