



**Discussion Brief Number 1/3013
Europe**

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Question 1

To what extent do you believe that now, as the challenges in the Eurozone drive fundamental change in Europe, is the right time to consider reforming our settlement with the EU?

We agree strongly that now is the right time for the UK and for the whole of Europe. The UK is becoming more eurosceptic as voters become frustrated with problems caused by the current arrangements. We must, however be constructive in the efforts we make, and not lose this opportunity create an EU that is strongly in our own national interest.

Question 2

How valuable to British business is our membership of the single market? And how important is it that the UK has a seat around the table having a say in what the rules of the single market are?

The EU is an important trading partner, but it is in relative economic decline. We should not be part of the single market at the expense of building markets further afield, for example through bilateral relationships with BRIC and other rapidly growing economies. Our objective should be to maximise our ability to trade with the whole world. European trade restrictions and tariffs, for example on the import of food from developing economies, risk damaging our ability to achieve this. The UK has an important role in Europe in using its "seat around the table" to argue against Protectionism and for Free Trade. It may be that we should seek to influence EU-wide product specifications and standards (although there was not universal agreement in our group on this subject). The free market should be separate from integration.



Question 3

What changes does the EU need to make to become more competitive and less bureaucratic?

In general we feel that the layers of bureaucracy and rules imposed by Europe (and gold-plated by UK civil servants) stifle economic activity.

Social Costs reduce European competitiveness and productivity. It should be for individual nations to decide the correct balance of social costs and competitiveness.

European Structures are confusing and foster bureaucracy. The parliament is unnecessary if national governments are sovereign. The Commission is bloated and unaccountable.

Strasbourg is an unnecessary and wasteful luxury.

Question 4

The Prime Minister called for a thorough examination of 'what the EU as a whole should do and should stop doing'. In what specific areas do you believe European co-operation is beneficial and what specific powers currently held at a European level should flow back to national governments?

Powers to Flow Back

Working Time Directive and all other employment legislation.

Agriculture and fisheries

Protectionist measures, particularly against the third world.

(Disputed) Industrial specifications/standards – these can favour large companies; it is often a nonsense to have the same standard/specification across Europe as conditions are different.

The UK's ability to restrict free movement of people.

Areas in which co-operation is beneficial (not discussed in detail)

The Common Market

Question 5

What risks and what benefits do you see there being in countries of the EU being able to decide for themselves the level of integration that is right for each?



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We acknowledge the risk of anarchy if every nation could cherry pick regulations – there cannot be 27 different arrangements. We suggest tiers of membership based on, for example, a free market alone; plus membership of the Euro; plus the objective of a federal Europe. We note that it would be difficult to design a simple system to incorporate even the existing opt outs, for example the UK/Irish opt out from the Schengen Agreement. We also acknowledge the risk that the UK will suffer reduced influence if we have more opt outs.

Question 6

What is your response to the Prime Minister's announcement that the next Conservative Manifesto will ask for a mandate from the British people for a Conservative Government to negotiate a new settlement with our European partners, to be put to the British people in a referendum, within the first half of the next parliament, with a very simple choice: stay in the EU on these new terms or come out altogether?

We strongly agree with the prime minister's approach.
We are concerned that the timetable he has given is ambitious, and perhaps not achievable. The PM must use the time available between now and the election to build momentum among sympathetic countries.
Politically we think it a sensible move: the Labour party was wrong to rule out a referendum; the country needs an open debate on this question and the PM has shown he is listening – and therefore a strong leader.
We are concerned about the role of the media, in particular the right wing press. There is a danger that we will vote No when it is not in our best interest because of media hysteria and misinformation.
Some discussion as to whether it is responsible to ask the people In or Out – large majority support this.

Other comments:

Discussion on the two objectives of a common market, which we support, and political union, which we do not. Some countries feel that political union is the price we must pay for the common market. This may be the case for members of the Euro, but is not the case for us. The project of political union has been allowed to overshadow that of the common market, and indeed of competitiveness.
Robust discussion over the risks for the UK. It might be that in the future we wish to join the Euro, and we should be cautious about losing that opportunity. Much depends on the economic prospects of the UK, and whether we can survive alone as an economic (and political?) power.
Interesting speculation on whether the Euro would have performed better if the UK had joined it at the start. Would Greece have been allowed to join? Moreover would its rules have prevented Labour from creating the large budget deficit?

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