

Experts Discuss European Integration After Brexit Vote

Kayla Pantano (September 16, 2016)



At Columbia Law School, a panel of distinguished speakers shed light on what Brexit means and the future of the European Union.

On September 15, the [Columbia Law School](#) [2] in association with the [Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America](#) [3] presented, “The Future of Integration in Europe and Beyond.” This major conference consisted of three separate panels and featured distinguished speakers from academia, business, and government.



During the first event, “European Integration after the Brexit Vote,” moderator [Anu Bradford](#) [4], Professor at Columbia Law, immediately sets out to answer what Brexit will look like, specifically in regards to the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Defining Brexit

In his response, [John Authers](#) [5], senior investment commentator at the Financial Times, references the black drawbridge printed on the day’s program, superimposed over a colorful map.

“My single most likely scenario for what Brexit means is that Britain really is going to pull up the drawbridge and slam halt to it, to migration, to the U.K., accepting in the process the damage that this will do to the financial services in the city, and accepting that we lose direct access to the single market,” he says.

However, he also explains that it’s possible for the UK to maintain access to the single market and to accept a more limited shift in the migration policy in return.

Is Brexit Reversible?

Authers thinks it’s possible for the U.K. to remain in the EU through a second referendum as opposed to a general election, or alternatively through the impending fall of the Euro in which case the issue will be muted.

[Armando Varricchio](#) [6], ambassador of Italy to the United States, on the other hand, defines Brexit as “a fact,” adding, “I don’t think it’s possible to turn back.” Yet, he points out that with many European elections taking place in 2017, including in the Netherlands, France, and Germany, it will make it difficult for Britain to trigger [Article 50](#) [7]—a section of the Lisbon Treaty that is necessary to enact for withdrawal from the EU.

Freedom of Movement

When speaking of the future of the relationship between the U.K. and the EU, Varricchio emphasizes the importance of freedom of movement. He ensures that the EU will be able to find legal arrangements in order to achieve the latter, as maintaining passport privileges is a key concern for many.

“What cannot be taken off the table, unless we completely change the dynamic of Europe, is free movement because this will be the end of what we consider nowadays Europe,” he explains.

Authers compares the division between those in favor of leaving to the current division in the American Republican Party, pointing out that there is a Chamber of Commerce, pro-business side and a Populist, anti-immigration side.

In agreement with Varricchio, he later adds a personal note and shares that his American wife can reassuringly live and work in 28 countries with the British passport she attained two and half years ago.

“My kids, until recently, I assumed would have the right if they wanted to go—they speak Spanish very well because a couple of them were born in Mexico—and live in Barcelona or Madrid. That is wonderful,” he continues.

He also disagrees that immigration is of any great harm in the U.K., and argues that it is “utterly economic.” “We have a great Eastern European population in the U.K. willing to do jobs better than the indigenous population,” he explains.

In stark contrast to Varricchio and Authers, [Joseph Weiler](#) [8], professor at NYU Law School, believes that free movement is not possible. “If they divorce us, we’ll divorce them,” he says. Later adding, “There’s a fear that if you give Britain too cozy a ride, it might be too tempting for other countries to ask for the same deal.”



Arguments for Brexit

Sir [John Vickers](#) [9], professor at Oxford University, views Brexit as a universal disaster and foresees little scope for a reversal. Yet he remains optimistic about trade in goods, considering tariff levels are currently minimal. He's also thankful that the U.K. uses the pound.

"Leaving common currency is formidably difficult, as we saw in the varying stages of the Greek crisis," he says.

Vickers diplomatically proposes two arguments in favor of Brexit. First, "There is dysfunction in the decision-making of the EU, such that many important decisions don't get taken." Second, that the current way to be internationalist is to look outside of Europe to India, China, and so forth.

The Future of the EU

When Bradford ventures to answer whether the EU will survive this or unravel at the seams, Weiler responds with the same zest from earlier. He calls Britain's decision "regrettable" and "totally unnecessary," predicting that it will lead to the break of the U.K. in result of its damage to the EU and to the rest of the world.

He anticipates a "grim" future and a revolt of the masses if the "fundamental democracy deficit," or what he describes as the lack of choice in politics, is not addressed. However, if Brexit returns a say to the people, he believes the future will be okay but not yet "rosy."

Vickers sees "no way that we can be a full member [of the single market] and have immigration controls." For him, the solution is for EU members to integrate more economically and for others to be more flexible. Unfortunately, he thinks it's impossible because of treaty changes and referendums to follow.

"Europe is trapped in this very unfortunate economic situation. It may turn out okay, but I think there are big risks attached to that," he says.

What Should the EU Set to Achieve?

Varricchio hopes to ensure that the EU will remain a viable project. "We should never forget where we come from. There is a reason we created this artificial body we came to name the EU," he says.

He continues to express the urgency to increase the EU's legitimacy. He argues that having more members in the EU makes it more difficult for policy-making, but that for him this is "true democracy."

"We have to move on. There is a process that we have to cherish, that we have to promote, that we have to make more effective, but this is what we have," he concludes. "I think that our leaders should speak their minds and have the courage to tell the truth to their citizens. Because what Brexit tells us is that nothing is given for granted."

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[4] http://www.law.columbia.edu/fac/Anu_Bradford



[5] <http://www.ft.com/markets/john-authers>

[6] http://www.ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/ambasciata_washington/en/aboutus/ambasciatore.html/

[7] <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-European-union-and-comments/title-6-final-provisions/137-article-50.html>

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[9] <http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/Academic/john-vickers>