

Pros and Cons in the Brexit Campaign

What do They Tell Us About the European Union?

On January 23rd 2013, David Cameron, Prime Minister of the UK, gave a speech at the London headquarters of Bloomberg.¹ In this speech – which recalls Margaret Thatcher’s Bruges speech of 1988² in its tone, structure and also content – he promised a referendum for the British electorate on remaining in or leaving the European Union. To the great surprise of both British and European citizens, on 16 June 2016 the majority (51.9%) of British voters decided to leave the European Union.

Since one big and influential member state leaving the European Union is an unprecedented and major development in economic, political and also institutional terms, a vast number of analyses has and will come out about its various aspects. It is worth looking at the procedural questions of exiting the EU (Art. 50) and how it is being implemented for the first time; the economic consequences for both the UK and the EU; and political aspects such as electoral participation, the party-system, populism and political communication. In this paper I concentrate on the arguments of the ‘leave’ and the ‘remain’ campaign – I am interested in what kind of stories and narratives hide behind the arguments and what they tell us about the perception of the European Union by both sides.

My analysis belongs to the interpretive school of political science. Interpretive approaches in political science argue that human behaviour, as well as political action, is based beliefs and preferences. When people make a certain (political) choice, they do so because they share the values of the selected party, or they think that their choice will add to their well-being or the well-being of their community. However, these preferences, and, more importantly, the beliefs behind these preferences can hardly be identified on the basis of sociological data (income status, education, nationality etc.) The interpretive school of political science argues that we can reconstruct ways of thinking that (of course not as an only factor) influence political action on the basis of what people say – the narratives, the discourse.³ My analysis remotely

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¹ David Cameron, EU speech at Bloomberg, 23 January 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg>.

² Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to the College of Europe ('The Bruges Speech')* 20 September 1988. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>.

³ David Marsh, Gerry Stoker, *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Palgrave, 2010) 131–134.

relates the to the emerging sub-discipline of campaign studies⁴ – as I am interested in exploring the image of the European Union on both sides, which has been expressed in the Brexit campaign in a concentrated manner.

In order to analyse the ‘Leave’ and the ‘Remain’ arguments in the Brexit campaign and what they say about the European Union, within the interpretive framework of the approach of political science, I use the concept of myths. In the first part of my article I collect the main features of political myths as a theoretical framework for my argument. In the second section I explore the current myths and their challenges in the contemporary European Union. In the third part I identify the major ‘Leave’ and ‘Remain’ arguments in the Brexit campaign and explore how they fit into the myth-countermyth framework within the EU. At the end, I draw some preliminary conclusions.

I Myths and Countermyths – Summary of the Theoretical Framework

Myths have been the subject of theory-building in various fields in social sciences and humanities: anthropology, theology, linguistics, psychology and art-history, as well as literature, history and political science.⁵ Here – without the intention of giving a full picture on myth-theory – I concentrate on related key findings in political science, being fully aware that most times it is difficult to establish the borders between myth-theories in general and the ones on political myths.

As Christopher Flood suggests, ‘a myth is a narrative, a story which presents a sequence of connected events.’⁶ He argues that it is worth distinguishing between two types: sacred myths and political myths. Sacred myths refer to ideas and narratives usually built around the issues of the creation of gods (theogonic myths), the creation of the world (cosmogonic myths) or the creation of man (anthropogonic myths). While closely connected to sacred myths in functions, dissemination and other aspects, political myths help to explain – and understand – a current political system. There are several definitions available for the concept of political myth other than Flood’s; the basic disagreement among writers seems to be whether political myths necessarily have a ‘true’ basis (if we dissect the word ‘mythology’ into two originally Greek words, *mythos* refers to belief and *logos* to reason and knowledge). A group of analysts argue that the major dividing line between sacred myths and political myths is the element of truth, empirical facts, events or widely observable phenomena, which is only characteristic of the

⁴ See e.g. Margaret Scammell, ‘Political Marketing: Lessons for Political Science’ (1999) 47 *Political Studies*, 718–739, or Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, David M. Farrell, ‘Studying Political Campaigns and Their Effects’ in Farrell, David M., Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck (eds), *Do Political Campaigns Matter? Campaign Effects in Elections and Referendums* (Routledge 2004, London) 1–21.

⁵ Julie Barbara Jane Reid, *A Theoretical Explanation of the Construction of Counter Myth: a Case Study of Post Apartheid South African Film* (PhD Dissertation, University of South Africa, 2011.) http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/5961/dissertation_reid_j.pdf?sequence=1.

⁶ Christopher Flood, *Political Myths. A Theoretical Introduction* (Routledge 2002, London and New York) 27.

latter.⁷ This assertion can also be found in Christopher Flood's definition; he states, when elaborating his previously quoted definition, that political myths are narratives of past, present or predicted political events which their teller wants to make understandable for their communities.⁸ In this system of thought, political myths do not need to be sacred (i.e. unchallengeable) in modern societies, but they need to be accepted as fundamentally true by the group or society in which they appear. Since in everyday usage the word 'myth' may refer to stories that are provably untrue or invented,⁹ it is necessary that the explanations that political myths provide should be accepted as true by their communities. On the other hand, other authors say that the much underlined truth element is not a central characteristic of even political myths. George Schöpflin argues that myths provide a group with a story that help a group identify where they have come from and what makes them different from others. These beliefs (*mythos*) do not necessarily have to do with facts or rationality (*logos*). 'Myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths (in so far they exist at all), about the ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and natural and others as perverse and alien.'¹⁰ Botticci and Challand define political myths as 'the work on a common narrative, which provides significance to the political conditions of a social group'. For them, the major elements of political myths are that they coagulate and reproduce significance, that they are shared by a certain group and that they address the specifically political conditions of a given group.¹¹

Political myths are not static by nature: they evolve over time and change according to different influences – political campaigns, elections, scandals, economic processes, international influences; the list is endless. It is more useful to understand myths as a process of continuous work on a pattern that may be subject to change according to the change of circumstances.¹² Thus, when analysing current myths of the European Union, accordingly, we can only take a snapshot of a certain point in time.

Myths can appear in a number of forms. Politicians may refer to them in speeches and interviews; artists express them in very different works of art; in the mediatised world of politics, they can be expressed in innumerable forms of photos, clips, logos and other visual images (also on the borderline of fiction); they can be seen in different rituals, such as memorial days,

⁷ See e.g. David Archard, 'Myths, Lies and Historical Truth: A defence of Nationalism' *Political Studies* (1995) 43, 472–481, and Vincent della Sala, 'Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union' (2010) 48 (1) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1–19.

⁸ Flood (n 6) 29.

⁹ This statement is especially true in the case of the European Union – the European Commission runs a blog called 'Euromyths' where distorted or untruthful stories about the EU are presented and corrected. Since most of that information appears in the British media, the blog is run on the EC/UK website. <http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/ECintheUK/>.

¹⁰ George Schöpflin, 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths' in Geoffrey Hosking, George Schöpflin (eds), *The Myths of Nationhood* (Hurst & Company 1997, London) 19–35.

¹¹ Chiara Botticci, Benoit Challand, 'Rethinking Political Myth. The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy' (2006) 9 (3) *European Journal of Social Theory*, 315–336.

¹² Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (MIT 1988, Massachusetts).

celebrations, marches and awards; in social practices such as participation in celebrations (or indeed, elections), support of different decisions etc.¹³ Bennett even argues that myths are practically everywhere to such a degree that they can slip into our unconscious, that they not only influence the way we perceive the world around us but they can be understood as lenses through which we see it.¹⁴ This understanding of political myths also includes the notion that myths are not only rational constructions: emotions are also part of them. As Botticci and Challand put it, ‘political myths are mapping devices through which we look at the world, feel about it and therefore also act within it as a social group’.¹⁵

As well as being diffuse in appearance, myths also coagulate or crystallize into a few images, icons or stories. Myths can be discussed at length when writers or scholars elaborate on them; however, most can be expressed very briefly, clearly, and, most importantly, understandably to the public. As Bell argues, ‘Myth serves to flatten the complexity, the nuance, the performative contradictions of human history’.¹⁶ The power of myth lies in the ability to tell a simple story that makes the evolution of a society and its polity intelligible to people.¹⁷ This is why it is possible to use them very expressively using visual communication tools in modern media politics.¹⁸ This ‘iconic nature’ of myths makes them highly visible to the public and also those actors who ‘use’ them (we will come back to actors of myths later) but also makes their analysis – especially scientific research – rather difficult. Behind one image, action or political speech, the appearance of a particular myth can be observed but it is hard to prove it was conscious and deliberate.¹⁹

There are several types of political myths. There are foundational or primary myths that concern the origins of a community, telling when and how a community started to belong together, including references to who belongs to the group (us) and who doesn’t (them). ‘Golden Age’ myths recall successful periods in history, great days to remember that serve to maintain hope in times of crisis. ‘Suffering myths’ refer to hard days back in time, also giving hope for the future, since the community was able to survive. All communities also have ‘exceptionalism’ myths, showing they are unique and serving as a source of pride for its members.²⁰

Myths survive because there are actors in a community who keep them alive.²¹ The ‘storytellers’ can be different actors in the society. Most visible of these actors are politicians who publicly talk about and to their communities on occasions such as memorial days, electoral campaigns, even in ordinary interviews. But myths are also told by several other actors: journalists, commentators, bloggers when writing about current events, academics when

¹³ Flood (n 6) 161.

¹⁴ Lane W. Bennett, ‘Myth, Ritual and Political Control’ (1980) 30 *Journal of Communication*, 166–179.

¹⁵ Botticci–Challand (n 11) 321.

¹⁶ Duncan Bell, ‘Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology and National Identity’ (2003) 54 (1) *British Journal of Sociology*, 63–81.

¹⁷ Della Sala (n 7) 4.

¹⁸ Flood (n 6) 166.

¹⁹ Botticci–Challand (n 11).

²⁰ Della Sala (n 7) 7.

²¹ Bell (n 16).

analysing social processes, civil society organisations when bringing members together or organising projects, teachers at school, parents in their families, friends in pubs. Myth interweaves society. ‘Myths need social actors to bring them to life and to ensure that they continue to tell a story that resonates. But if civil society chooses to craft and promote its own myths, then the legitimacy of the political rule is likely to be put into question.’²² The elite and the public should thus share the political myths they tell: this is an important factor that we should keep in mind when analysing myths and countermyths in the European Union.

Myths have their own evolution and go through three stages of development: diffusion, ritual and sacredness.²³ In the first period, the narrative is told by several actors within society. With regard to nation-building, analysts of collective identity formation offer a wide range of theories about how this diffusion happens and who tells the stories.²⁴ Ethno-symbolists argue that symbols and narratives are there in the collective memory as building blocks,²⁵ whereas constructivists say that all of us are members of ‘imagined communities’ where elites created the stories of belonging.²⁶ In the second period, rituals start to be attached to the narratives in the form of memorial days (9 May in the case of the European Union), prizes (e.g. Karlspreis established by the city of Aachen in 1950) or other community acts. In the third phase the myth becomes sacred, not in the religious meaning of the word but suggesting that the existence of the political community it belongs to is in itself unquestionable.

Political myths, as stated above, are not static by nature. This notion implies that that one particular myth is, on the one hand, subject to change within the framework of a particular narrative, or, on the other hand, it is also possible, that within the same group, an alternative explanation may potentially emerge, offering a different view for the community. Thus, it may be more precise to call myths accepted by the majority of community as ‘dominant’ myths – since the pluralistic nature of societies necessarily brings about alternatives. Reid argues that emerging alternative explanations of the basic issues in a community – countermyths – have been either ignored or under-researched and under-theorised in the myth literature.²⁷

Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist and philosopher, was first to mention the idea on countermyths in his volume ‘Mythologies.’²⁸ The concept was quoted and partially discussed further by John Fiske in his Introduction to Communication Studies, where he argued that subcultures in a society offer alternative explanations to those of mainstream (dominant)

²² Della Sala (n 7) 8.

²³ Della Sala (n 7) 9.

²⁴ Koller Boglárka, ‘The Fading Civic Identity of EU Nationals – With a Special Focus on the East-Central Europeans Attachments’ in Ágh Attila, Vass László (eds), *In European Futures: The Perspectives of the New Member States in the new Europe* (BCCB 2012, Budapest).

²⁵ E.g. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Blackwell 1986, Oxford).

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised Edition, Verso 1991).

²⁷ Reid (n 5) 26.

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies. Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers* (The Noonday Press 1972, New York).

myths.²⁹ Mary Sheridan-Rabideau described counter-myths as partly a social action of criticism against competing, mainly dominant, myths and also as the attempt to establish new myths.³⁰ When identifying the social functions of counter-myths, Reid builds on the functions of myths in general, adding the particularities of counter-myths. With regard to the function of self-definition (defining ‘us’ and ‘them’ for a community), counter-myths perform a double task: first they reject the definition offered by dominant myths and, second, the communities concerned ‘accept the counter myth which encodes the identity of a certain group in a way which distinguishes it from the dominant myth discourse.’³¹ Counter myths, just like dominant myths, are there to simplify reality. Counter myths are also there to make the alternative explanations understandable, but here they also have a double task: they use the simplified encoding of the dominant myth and their own simplified view of the community as well.³² Myths in general as usually used for explaining why and how a particular community arrived at a certain position.³³ They account for what happened in the past and how and also, reflect on the present and the future. The same is true for countermyths, with the distinction that they offer an alternative explanation for the community.³⁴

Countermyths undoubtedly challenge dominant myths. They express the need for change; they are able to inspire the tellers of the dominant myths to review their version of why the community belongs together. Countermyths may induce processes where the revision of dominant myths leads to create a more accepted version, or that countermyths can actually ‘win’ and become a dominant narrative in a community. I argue that currently in the European Union we experience a struggle between dominant myths (those of the EU supporting elite, EU officials, pro-EU academics, and other tellers of the traditional Monnet-Schuman discourse) and countermyths offered by parties and politicians who are usually identified by the increasingly complex ‘Euroseptic’ attribute.

II Myths and Countermyths in the European Union

The statement that the European Union/European Communities have had their political myths when they were established is a subject of debate among scholars. Obradovic argues that the legitimacy crisis of the European project is rooted in the missing myth of origin, that it lacks an essentially organic, mythical foundation.³⁵ Most scholars who wrote on the subject of myths and

²⁹ John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (Routledge 1982, London) 90.

³⁰ Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau, ‘The Stuff that Myths Are Made of: Myth Building as Social Action’ in *Written Communication*. October 2001, 18. 440–469.

³¹ Reid (n 5) 60.

³² Reid (n 5) 61.

³³ See Schöpflin (n 10) 210 and also Tudor, Henry, *Political Myth* (Pall Mall 1972, London)

³⁴ Reid (n 5) 63.

³⁵ Daniela Obradovic, ‘Policy Legitimacy and the European Union’ (1996) 2 (34) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 191–221.

the EU – and they were not numerous, although recently growing in number – argue quite the contrary. Hansen and Williams state that the European project has had its special mythology, although it was intentionally a rather non-political one – the functional, technocratic picture that the EC drew of itself was really a mythical explanation of the birth and nature of the new political community.³⁶ Vincent della Sala argues that the European Union has a strong foundational myth built on humanist values, such as peace, tolerance, diversity, solidarity and progress, going back centuries and with rituals already built around them.³⁷ Eric Jones collected illustrations of the existence of the economic mythology of European integration.³⁸

In this section I not only support the latter authors in proving, by showing examples, that the European Union and its predecessors have successfully built myths around an emerging polity but I also argue that a different narrative is offered as countermyths of the European project. Countermyths are identified on the basis of statements, opinions and arguments usually connected to Euroscepticism. Although it is rather problematic to define Euroscepticism, which contains notions from explicit opposition to the entire existence of the EU or EU membership to expressing hostility or deep reluctance towards present EU structures and the modus operandi of the EU (legitimacy, pooling of sovereignty, delegation of powers to EU institutions, introduction of new policies etc.)³⁹, I argue that on the basis of their discourse, the core countermyths defined theoretically in the previous chapter can be identified even if I accept the argument of Cecile Leconte that Euroscepticism shows variations from member state to member state.⁴⁰

The following list is based on research carried out on the history of the European Union (Arató–Koller 2013, Arató–Koller 2015). On the other hand, the examples I bring for supporting my argument can, of course be taken as random samples. They are mostly quotations from the founding fathers, member state and EU politicians and key documents from the history of the EU. I am fully aware that images, symbols, cartoons, documentaries, and other actions could be brought here in order to fully support my view – with the careful distinction that myths and countermyths can vary from one member state to another – if that is at all possible. As quoted from Botticci and Challand above, the research findings about myths can quite easily be observed but hardly proven.⁴¹ Thus, the following part should be taken as hypotheses for further research, with the qualification that research tools and methods have yet to be identified and selected carefully.

³⁶ Hansen, Lene, Williams, Michael C., ‘The Myths of Europe: Legitimacy, Community and the ‘Crisis’ of the EU’ (1999) 37 (2) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 233–249.

³⁷ Della Sala (n 7) 11.

³⁸ Eric Jones, ‘The Economic Mythology of European Integration’ (2010) 48 (1) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 89–109.

³⁹ Cecile Leconte, *Understanding Euroscepticism* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010, Basingstoke) 8.

⁴⁰ Leconte (n 39) 4.

⁴¹ Botticci–Challand (n 11) 321.

1 Myth No. 1: Peace

‘World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. (...) With this aim in view, the French Government proposes that action be taken immediately on one limited but decisive point. It proposes that Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.’⁴²

The quoted Schuman declaration is considered as the first and key proof of the intention of the Founding Fathers of the European project, which still serves as a basis as the strongest sign of the existence of a foundational myth of the European Union. It says that Europe – especially France and Germany – has learned the lessons of history, the lessons from numerous wars between the two nations and across the whole Continent over the previous centuries. Weaver argues that in European identity politics, where not only ‘us’ but also those who are ‘the others,’ ‘them’ (i.e. those who are different from us) have to be defined: in the case of Europe, ‘Europe’s past of wars and divisions is held up as the other to be negated, and on this basis it is argued that ‘Europe’ can only be if we avoid renewed fragmentation.’⁴³

The foundational myth of peace is supported by publications on the historical roots of European integration going back beyond 1945. There are collections published on the idea of Europe dating back to the 14th century. Pierre Dubois, Dante Alighieri, Hugo Grotius, Immanuel Kant, Victor Hugo, Friedrich Naumann and other philosophers, political advisers and writers were already forerunners of the modern integration process built pre-eminently on establishing peace in Europe. This approach, called ‘idealistic’ by Neill Nugent,⁴⁴ is confirmed by European institutions – surprisingly also by the ‘nonmajoritarian,’ regulatory⁴⁵ institution, the European Central Bank (ECB). European institutions, as part of their PR activities, present information for the public, also in the form of short films for educational purposes. Even the short video on the history of the ECB starts with WWII confirming the foundational myth of the EU.⁴⁶

The EU’s anti-war foundational myth has not been actively used for a long time; we can also say it was taken for granted by the story-tellers of the EU and the public as well. However, it has

⁴² The Schuman Declaration 9 May 1950 <http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration/>.

⁴³ Ole Weaver, ‘European Security Identities’ (1996) 34 (1) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 103–132.

⁴⁴ Neill Nugent, *The Government and Politics of the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010, Houndmills, Basingstoke) 9.

⁴⁵ Giandomenico Majone, ‘Integration and Democracy: the Big Trade-Off’ in Majone, Giandomenico (ed), *Dilemmas of European Integration. The Ambiguities and Pitfalls of Integration by Stealth* (Oxford University Press 2005, Oxford) 23–41.

⁴⁶ The History of the European Central Bank. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aijn_4TFF_8.

been reinforced in the midst of the economic and financial crisis that has threatened the Eurozone since 2008. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in the Bundestag in October 2011 – when asking support for the German position:

‘Nobody should take another 50 years of peace and prosperity in Europe for granted. They are not for granted. That’s why I say, if the euro fails, Europe fails. (...) We have a historical obligation: to protect Europe’s unification process begun by our forefathers after centuries of hatred and bloodshed by all means. None of us can foresee what the consequences would be if we were to fail.’⁴⁷

A clear reference to the widespread foundational myth of the European project is recited in the recent declaration called *New Narrative for Europe*:

The European integration project was born like a phoenix out of the ashes of World War I and World War II. 100 years ago, Europe lost its soul on the battlefields and in the trenches. Later, it damned itself within the concentration camps and the totalitarian systems associated with extreme nationalism, anti-Semitism, the abolition of democracy and rule of law, the sacrifice of individual freedom and the suppression of civil society. But, since the end of World War II, the ideal of a Europe united by the principle of mutual respect and the values of freedom and democracy has brought redemption. Europe’s soul was restored. Today the European integration process stands against all forms of war.⁴⁸

2 Myth No. 2: Rationality

While the Schuman declaration also made reference to the establishment of a European federation, reality showed that this aim was not going to be on the agenda for long. Instead of the *finalité politique*, actors and theorists concentrated on the process of integration in the 1950s and 60s – that is, actually also present in the founding text. The reference on sectoral integration, starting with coal and steel and the establishment of the High Authority, refers to the neofunctionalist school of thought. Ernst Haas, one of the first theoreticians of neofunctionalism has a telling sentence on the nature and the spirit of the new institutional setup:

‘Converging economic goals embedded in the bureaucratic, pluralistic and industrial life of modern Europe provided the crucial impetus. The economic technician, the planner, the innovating industrialist, and trade unionist advanced the movement, not the politician, the scholar, the poet, the writer.’⁴⁹

Accordingly, the system to be created lacked any of the open romantic references to values, political motivations and alike usual in high politics. This is why Obradovic argued that until

⁴⁷ Merkel addresses Bundestag on euro rescue plans. Oct. 26. 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mJoi8mlmYA>.

⁴⁸ European Commission, *A New Narrative for Europe 2014* http://ec.europa.eu/debate-future-europe/new-narrative/pdf/declaration_en.pdf.

⁴⁹ Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950–1957* (2nd edn, Stanford University Press 1968, Stanford CA) xix.

1992 the European project lacked any mythical foundation.⁵⁰ Whereas Hansen and Williams demonstrated that neo-functional anti-political sentiments also create their own myth, the myth of rationality.⁵¹ The elements of this myth are low politics, the community method (or the Monnet-method), where institutions independent of national governments would make rational policy (and not political) decisions, and the idea of efficiency.

The myth of rationality still prevails: whereas an abundance of books and analyses are published on the political system of the European Union, all suggesting that the EU is already a (*sui generis*) political system with all its political implications,⁵² the European Commission still maintains a picture of itself as a predominantly technocratic and bureaucratic institution concentrating mainly on efficient implementation of EU legal instruments and not as a political player.

3 Myth No. 3: Economic Co-operation and Success

Neill Nugent, in his introductory book on the European Union, on the different editions of which generations of European studies students grew up, states that if we have to discover the historical roots of the European project, instead of political and philosophical texts from the Middle Ages and after, we should concentrate on the field of economic history. He quotes Pollard on the 19th century European economy:

‘Europe’s industrialisation proceeded relatively smoothly, among other reasons, precisely because it took place within what was in many essentials a single economy, with fair amount of movement of labour, a greater amount of freedom for the movement of goods, and the greatest freedom of all for the movement of technology, know-how and capital.’⁵³

The idea of post-WWII integration was explicitly economic as well as political. Robert Schuman, acknowledging that a European federation being the long-term objective, stated that the immediate goal was to ensure ‘the modernisation of production and the improvement of its quality; the supply of coal and steel on equal terms to the French and German markets... (and) to those of the (other) member countries; and the equalisation as well as the improvement in the living standards and working conditions in those industries.’⁵⁴ Jean Monnet, in the very first issue of the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, also stressed the need for economic cooperation ‘The need was political as well as economic. (...) We thought that both these objectives could in time be reached if conditions were created enabling these countries to increase their resources by merging them in a large and dynamic common market; and if these

⁵⁰ Obradovic (n 35) 198.

⁵¹ Hansen–Williams (n 36) 237.

⁵² E.g. Nugent (n 44) or Simon Hix, Hoyland, *The Political System of the European Union* (3rd edn, Palgrave Macmillan 2011, Basingstoke).

⁵³ Sidney Pollard, *The Integration of the European Economy since 1815* (George Allen & Unwin 1981, London) Quoted by Nugent (n 44) 10.

⁵⁴ The thought of Robert Schuman is quoted by Peter Stirk and David Weigall (eds), *The Origins and Development of European Integration: A Reader and Commentary* (Pinter 1999, London and New York) 87–88.

same countries could be made to consider that their problems were no longer solely of national concern, but were mutual European responsibilities.⁵⁵

The economic myth of European integration contains the notion that the steps made by European institutions could only happen the way they did and they inevitably lead to a political union. As the White Paper on the Completion of the Single Market states: ‘Just as the customs union had to precede economic integration, so economic integration has to precede European unity.’⁵⁶

Not only economic co-operation but also economic success and prosperity have been connected to the European project. The EU website, its part providing very general information for the public contains the following statements:

‘The EU is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 European countries that together cover much of the continent. The EU was created in the aftermath of the Second World War. The first steps were to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries which trade with one another become economically interdependent and so more likely to avoid conflict. (...) The EU has delivered half a century of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards, and launched a single European currency, the euro. (...)’⁵⁷

Major EU documents also echo the perception of connecting economic co-operation with growth, prosperity and success. The declaration Berlin Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome states:

‘We are facing major challenges which do not stop at national borders. The European Union is our response to these challenges. Only together can we continue to preserve our ideal of European society in future for the good of all European Union citizens. This European model combines economic success and social responsibility. The common market and the euro make us strong.’⁵⁸

The crisis dating from 2008 that started with the collapse of Lehman Brothers brought to surface the systemic inconsistencies of the Eurozone and negatively affected economic growth and employment. It reinforced the EU’s institutional and legitimacy problems, clearly mirrored in the declining general trust levels towards the Euro and the EU in general. Since economic cooperation – connected to success – is one of the leading myths of the European Union, that had to be very clearly questioned, the economic crisis contributed to the growing distrust of the EU and its institutions, although we have to admit that trust levels towards the EU change in parallel to those towards national governments.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Jean Monnet, ‘A Ferment of Change’ (1962) 1 (1) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 203–211.

⁵⁶ European Commission (1985) *Completing the Internal Market: White Paper from the Commission to the European Council* (Milan, 28-29 June 1985) COM(85) 310.

⁵⁷ How the EU works. http://europa.eu/about-eu/index_en.htm

⁵⁸ *Berlin Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome*. http://europa.eu/50/docs/berlin_declaration_en.pdf

⁵⁹ Eurobarometer 83.

4 Countermyth 1: Lack of Democracy

Although the democracy deficit, a widely discussed feature of the European institutional setup, was born in the 1980s, the criticism of the Communities from the democracy point of view is as old as the Schuman Declaration itself. The British, being suspicious towards anything other than traditional intergovernmental cooperation, had long debates in the House of Commons in the months after 9 May 1950. During this debate, John Strachey, the Secretary of State for War in the Attlee Government, argued against joining the formulating ECSC with the following statement:

‘(...) The Schuman Plan would put real power over Europe’s basic industries into the hands of an irresponsible body free from all democratic control. (...) For my part, a plan for international unity was unacceptable so long as it contained this provision as one of its essential features, and I stand by that statement. Such a plan appears to me to erect a barrier to democratic popular control over our two basic industries; and, let us never forget it, it is upon these basic industries that the very livelihoods of our people depend. The people of this country, and, to a lesser extent, the people of Western Europe, have just achieved a measure of democratic control over these industries. I could not and cannot accept a plan which puts them outside democratic control.’⁶⁰

The academic debate on the problematic nature of democratic features of the EU heated up after the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. Although this-ever growing literature can hardly be named Eurosceptic, or even be accused of a wish to provide arguments for building a countermyth for the European project, the issues they name do come back in political debates and reasoning. The widely known arguments refer to the increased executive power and at the same time decreased national parliamentary control in EU decision-making;⁶¹ the general weakness of the European Parliament (however strong development there has been in its participation in EU decision-making⁶²); the lack of real European level elections;⁶³ the distance between the EU and European citizens;⁶⁴ and the problem that, as a result of the above factors, the EU adopts policies that are not supported by the majority of citizens.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Secretary of State for War, John Strachey (Attlee Government) in the House of Commons, 11 July 1950. Hansard 1803-2005. http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1950/jul/11/schuman-plan-ministers-speech#S5CV0477P0_19500711_HOC_349.

⁶¹ Tapio Raiuno, ‘Always One Step Behind? National Legislatures and the European Union’ (1999) 34 (2) *Government and Opposition*, 180–202.

⁶² E.g. Shirley Williams ‘Sovereignty and Accountability’ in Keohane, Robert. o., Hoffmann, Stanley (eds) *The New European Community* (Westview Press 1991, Boulder, CO).

⁶³ Simon Hix, ‘Dimensions and Alignments in European Union Politics: Cognitive Constraints and Partisan Responses’ (1999) 35 *European Journal of Political Research*, 69–106, Gary Marks et al., ‘National Political Parties and European Integration’ (2002) 46 (3) *American Journal of Political Science*, 585–594.

⁶⁴ William Wallace, Smith, Julie, ‘Democracy or Technocracy? European Integration and the Problem of Popular Consent’ (1995) 18 (3) *West European Politics*, 137–157.

⁶⁵ Fritz Scharpf, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* (Oxford University Press 1999, Oxford), Wolfgang Streeck, Philippe Schmitter, ‘From National Corporatism to Transnational Pluralism: Organised Interests in the Single European Market’ (1991) 19 (2) *Politics and Society*, 133–164.

These arguments have been recently used in the European political arena, especially by clearly Eurosceptic parties and their representatives. The best known of them is Nigel Farage MEP, leader of the UK Independence Party, who co-chaired the *Europe of Freedom and Democracy* group in the European Parliament 2009-2014. In a speech in the European Parliament, on 24 February 2010, Farage questioned the legitimacy of Van Rompuy's appointment, asking 'Who are you? I'd never heard of you, nobody in Europe had ever heard of you.' He also stated that Van Rompuy's 'intention [is] to be the quiet assassin of European democracy and of the European nation states.'⁶⁶

This opinion, though clearly exaggerated and its style proved to be unacceptable (MEP Farage was fined 10 days' MEP allowances for his speech)⁶⁷ seems to reflect European public opinion. According to the Eurobarometer surveys, in three and a half years between autumn 2009 and spring 2013, positive opinions on how democracy works in the EU fell 12 percentage points while in the same period adverse opinions increased by 14 percentage points and they have not changed since.⁶⁸

5 Countermyth 2: Threat to National Sovereignty

According to Robert O. Keohane, it is rather troubling that the key concepts of international relations are constantly redefined and reinterpreted as the situation in the international arena change.⁶⁹ The concept of sovereignty clearly belongs to that category. Without the intention of giving a full analysis on the history and diverging interpretations of the term in this article, it is important to note that sovereignty includes at least two notions: internal sovereignty, meaning supremacy within a given territory over all other authorities (including the idea of popular sovereignty connected to the problem government legitimacy), and external sovereignty, referring to the independence of a state, being free from other external authorities.⁷⁰ The European integration process, with its supranational principles on pooling sovereignty, has most clearly moved away from the classic understanding of external sovereignty that does not allow governments to enter into processes where they do not have the right to veto. Although treaty amendments require full consent by member states, the supremacy and direct effect of EU law, the expansion of QMV in the Council, has limited (or changed) the traditional European concept of sovereignty. Thus, in the case of the European Union, 'under conditions of extensive and intensive interdependence, formal sovereignty becomes less a territorially defined barrier than a bargaining resource.'⁷¹ As Sir Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary under

⁶⁶ Nigel Farage harangues EU President Herman van Rompuy. *ELIX.TV. YouTube*, 24 February 2010.

⁶⁷ Nigel Farage fined for verbal attack on EU president. *theguardian.com* 2 March 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/mar/02/nigel-farage-fined-mep-rompuy>.

⁶⁸ Eurobarometer 83:139.

⁶⁹ Robert O. Keohane, 'Ironies of Sovereignty: The European Union and the United States' (2002) 40 (4) *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 743–765.

⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Verfassung Europas. Ein Essay* (Suhrkamp Verlag 2002, Berlin) 54.

⁷¹ Keohane (n 69).

Margaret Thatcher, expressed it more bluntly: ‘Sovereignty is not like virginity, which you either have or you don’t ... It is a resource to be used, rather than a constraint that limits our capacity for action.’⁷²

However, within the countermyth on sovereignty takeover, politicians expressing their concerns about this issue seem to think within the frame of the traditional understanding of the concept. The history of this ‘conceptual debate’ goes back as early as the 1960s. President de Gaulle was the first leading European politician to go back to the idea of traditional external sovereignty, both in words and in practice. In his words:

‘The fundamental divergence between the way the Brussels Commission conceived its role and my own government’s insistence, while looking to the Commission for expert advice, that important measures should be subordinated to the decisions of the individual states, nurtured an atmosphere of latent discord. But since the Treaty specified that, during the inaugural period, no decision was valid unless unanimous, it was enough to enforce its application to ensure that there was no infringement of French sovereignty.’⁷³

Just as de Gaulle intended to preserve sovereignty in its traditional meaning, not only with words but with actions like the empty chair crisis resulting in the Luxembourg Compromise in 1966 that altered the entire dynamism of Community decision-making,⁷⁴ the United Kingdom followed that line of argumentation in terms of external sovereignty. Margaret Thatcher, in her famous ‘Bruges speech’, which provided a basis for British Euroscepticism⁷⁵ as well as for the rebirth of intergovernmentalism, summarises her views on national sovereignty as follows:

‘My first guiding principle is this: willing and active cooperation between independent sovereign states is the best way to build a successful European Community. To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve. Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality.’⁷⁶

We still have to carry out thorough analyses on the effect of sovereignty in connection with the economic and financial crisis that started back in 2008 but we can make some preliminary statements. Clearly, not only theoretical and political but practical problems arose in Greece, when the Eurozone countries gave conditional financial aid for the country on the verge of bankruptcy for years. Jean Claude Juncker stated that ‘the sovereignty of Greece will be massively limited.’⁷⁷ Other countries did not ask for a life-saving bailout, and still used the issue

⁷² Geoffrey Howe, ‘Britain’s Place in the World’ (1990) 66 (4) *International Affairs*, 675–695. Cited in Keohane (n 69).

⁷³ Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope* (Simon and Schuster 1971), reprinted in Brent F Nelsen, Alexander Stubb (eds), *The European Union. Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration*. (Palgrave Macmillan 2003, Basingstoke) 27–45.

⁷⁴ Arató Krisztina, Koller Boglárka, *Képzelt Európa* (Balassi Kiadó 2013, Budapest) 114–118.

⁷⁵ Leconte (n 39) 3.

⁷⁶ Thatcher (n 2).

⁷⁷ Greece faces ‘massive’ loss of sovereignty. EUobserver, 07.11.2011. <http://euobserver.com/news/32582>.

of keeping national sovereignty as a kind of counter argument against the European Union. David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 2010 and 2016, launched a verbal and political fight both against the EU tackling the crisis and also against 'sovereignty takeover,' rather reversely, he argues for authority being located at national rather than European level, and therefore supranational trends should be resisted. (Cameron 2013)

Viktor Orbán, elected Prime Minister of Hungary in 2010, has used a special rhetorical strategy, built his politics on the basis of a 'freedom fight' and one of his opponents in this symbolic war is the European Union. This strategy includes regaining and keeping national sovereignty. As he stated in an interview given to the Daily Telegraph in the UK (quote from the article):

'As I get older [he is still only 50], I tend to be more sceptical. Values are more important than money. National sovereignty is more and more important in my mind. The question "Who is governing us?" is the key question.' So he supports David Cameron's efforts to change the European rules: 'We shall need a new basic treaty eventually'. He wants to join Britain in resisting 'the creeping movement of Brussels to eat up national sovereignty'.⁷⁸

6 Countermyth 3: Inability to Act

The decision-making system of the European Union, based on the so-called Monnet-method that balances community interests and national interest, has been traditionally slow. Already from the 1990s, experts in European law and politics raised the question of the efficiency of European decision-making. They argued that the continuously growing workload of the institutional system degraded the efficiency of decision-making⁷⁹ while others pointed to the dilution of the substantive content of EU legislation⁸⁰. Fritz Scharpf had already argued, back in 1988, that the EU is 'trapped' – according to his analysis, the Single European Act was unable to reduce the inefficiency and inflexibility of European decision-making because of the need for compromise between member governments.⁸¹ While being aware that the speed of the decision-making process is not the only determinant of efficiency, most of the analyses measured the timeframe of decisions from the Commission proposal to the decision of the Council. Heiner Schulz and Thomas König carried out empirical research in this subject – they found that while the majority-decision in the Council speeded up the process, the participation of the European

⁷⁸ Charles Moore, 'Viktor Orban Interview: Patriotism is a Good Thing' The Telegraph, 15 October 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/hungary/10373959/Viktor-Orban-interview-Patriotism-is-a-good-thing.html> (downloaded 10 May 2013).

⁷⁹ Reanud Dehousse, 'Constitutional Reform in the European Community: Are there Alternatives to the Majoritarian Avenue?' (1995) 18 *West European Politics*, 118–136.

⁸⁰ Van den Bos, J., 'The European Community' in B. Bueno de Mesquita, F. Stokman (ed), *European Community Decision Making* (Yale University Press 1994, New Haven).

⁸¹ Fritz Scharpf, 'The Joint-Decision Trap: Lessons from German Federalism and European Integration' (1988) 66 *Public Administration*, 239–278.

Parliament (with the intention to decrease the democracy deficit) increased the timeframe of decision-making.⁸²

Apart from social science research, the slowness and inefficiency of EU decision-making has been part of the public discourse as well. One of its prime examples was the more than 30 year deadlock on the directive on the Statute of the European Company,⁸³ where the requirement of unanimity in the Council halted the proposal many times before it was finally accepted.⁸⁴ However, when the multiple crisis of the European Union (economic, monetary, political, later migration) broke out after 2008, the inefficiency discourse intensified. Politicians and economic experts criticised the EU for being ineffective when it tried to tackle the problem of the crisis of the Eurozone. George Soros elaborated his criticisms in several articles and interviews regarding its treatment of both the Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis – very telling that lately he has been talking more about Angela Merkel’s leadership in connection with the problems of the European Union, than the Council.⁸⁵ Several right and extreme right politicians expressed their concerns with the weakness of EU leadership, including Nigel Farage and Viktor Orbán. The latter said, after the autumn 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, ‘What we see in the European Union is floating, being weak, uncertain and paralysed. There are endless negotiations and conferences but there are no solutions. We are trapped in ideologies instead of acting on the basis of common sense and our own cultural traditions.’⁸⁶

The picture would be very neatly explicable if we could say that myths express views of pro-EU politicians and countermyths arguments appear on the Eurosceptic side. Let us now demonstrate the contrary – and see what Gey Verhofstadt, former Belgian prime minister and president of ALDE faction of the European Parliament said: ‘The European Union’s list of crises keeps growing. But, beyond the United Kingdom’s “Brexit” vote to leave the bloc, Poland’s constitutional court imbroglio, Russian expansionism, migrants and refugees, and resurgent nationalism, the greatest threat to the EU comes from within: a crisis of political leadership is paralysing its institutions.

As if to prove the point, EU member states’ leaders (with the exception of UK Prime Minister Theresa May) met recently in Bratislava, Slovakia, in an attempt to demonstrate solidarity, and to kick-start the post-Brexit reform process. The attendees made some progress toward creating a European Defence Union, which should be welcomed, and toward admitting

⁸² Heiner Schulz, Thomas König, ‘Institutional Reform and Decision-Making – Efficiency in the European Union’ (2000) 4 (44) *American Journal of Political Science*, October 2000. PD. 653–666.

⁸³ Council Regulation (EC) No 2157/2001 of 8 October 2001 on the Statute for a European company (SE) *Official Journal L 294*, 10/11/2001 P. 0001–0021.

⁸⁴ The history of the legislation at <http://www.worker-participation.eu/European-Company-SE/History>

⁸⁵ See e.g. George Soros, Gregor Peter Schmitz: ‘The EU Is on the Verge of Collapse – An Interview’ *The New York Review of Books*, 11 February 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/02/11/europe-verge-collapse-interview/>

⁸⁶ Viktor Orbán, ‘Speech in the Hungarian Parliament 16 November 2016’ Own translation. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedekek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-napirend-elotti-felozolalasa20151116>.

that the EU's current organisational framework is unsustainable; but there was scant talk of meaningful institutional or economic reform.

Meanwhile, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's refusal, at the close of the summit, to appear onstage with French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel all but confirmed fears that rudderless leadership is fuelling institutional dysfunction. A summit that was supposed to be a display of unity revealed only further division.⁸⁷

After identifying the current myths (peace, rationality, economic co-operation and success) and countermyths (lack of democracy, threat to national sovereignty and inability to act) of the European Union, it is time to turn to our main subject – how those narratives came up in the referendum campaign on Brexit in the UK.

III Arguments and Counter-Arguments in the Brexit Campaign

As stated in the introduction, this article is remotely related to the emerging sub-discipline of political science that is called campaign studies. What I am interested in is the arguments, the narratives that were expressed in the campaign in the United Kingdom during the Brexit campaign, about the European Union. Since only a few months passed since the referendum, no exhaustive textual analysis has been published so far, I therefore decided to collect the arguments on the basis of summaries of arguments that were compiled to inform votes especially in the final stages of the campaign. (Table 1)

⁸⁷ Guy Verhofstadt: *Europe's Leadership Crisis*. September 12 2016. *Project Syndicate*. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/european-union-leadership-crisis-by-guy-verhofstadt-2016-09>.

1. Table: Leave and remain arguments in the Brexit campaign⁸⁸

| Issue | LEAVE | REMAIN |
|-------------|--|---|
| Sovereignty | <p>'Britain is a great nation with a proud history that has been forced into subservience to the unelected bureaucrats of Brussels. Outside the EU, Britain could resume its place as a powerful independent power. It is the world's 5th biggest economy and 5th most potent military force with its own nuclear deterrent. It is a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. Freed from restraints in Europe, Britain could rebuild ties with natural English-speaking allies in the Commonwealth and strengthen the Special Relationship with the United States.'⁸⁹</p> | <p>'Being in the EU gives Britain a more powerful role in the world and a say in major global decisions. We would still need to comply with many EU laws and regulations and in the future have no influence on new ones.'⁹⁰</p> <p>'EU membership involves some loss of sovereignty but it is a worthwhile trade for the influence it brings. In return for agreeing to abide by EU rules the UK has a seat around the table at which they are set and its voice is amplified on the world stage as a result.'⁹¹</p> |
| Democracy | <p>'Britain is the birthplace of modern parliamentary democracy. It is time to free it from the murky decision-making of the EU where the un-elected Commission initiates legislation, national veto rights have been steadily undermined and lack of voter interest has eroded any claims to legitimacy by the European Parliament.'⁹²</p> | <p>'The EU has a better level of democratic scrutiny than any other international: the UN, NATO, WTO, IMF, World Bank etc.'⁹³</p> |

⁸⁸ Table compiled as a result of extensive keyword search of campaign information available on the Internet. I thank Alan Emery for his kind contribution.

⁸⁹ <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.V-vPZ1Ka0dU>

⁹⁰ http://www.strongerin.co.uk/get_the_facts#uVaMzl8HQGzFbcAr.99

⁹¹ <http://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit-0>

⁹² <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.V-vPZ1Ka0dU>

⁹³ <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Leave-remain-the-facts-behind-the-claims.pdf> p.4

| Issue | LEAVE | REMAIN |
|---------|--|--|
| Economy | <p>'Over-regulation by the EU has cost the British economy over £125 billion. Freed from Brussels red tape, the UK economy would thrive like Norway or Switzerland – two of the most successful states in Europe. Britain could negotiate its own trade deals with the likes of China, the United States and Russia on terms tailor-made to suit the national interest. Trade with the EU countries would continue – it will be in their interests to maintain Britain's access to the European free market. Taxpayers would get an immediate saving of over £20 million a day from Britain not having to pump money into the EU budget. British farmers, fishermen and small businesses would all be free from ruinous Brussels policies.'⁹⁴</p> | <p>'Over half Britain's trade goes to the EU, bringing the country around £400 billion a year. That dwarfs any savings from not contributing to the EU budget. Over one-in-ten British jobs are directly linked to EU membership and studies show Brexit could wipe up to 10 percent from UK GDP. International companies invest in Britain because it's a gateway to the EU's 500 million consumers. Even if a post-Brexit UK persuaded former partners to grant it Norway-style access to the EU market, it would have to accept EU rules without any say in shaping them.'⁹⁵</p> <p>'Being in Europe boosts our economy which is why 9 out of 10 economic experts predict economic damage if we left.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Governor of the Bank of England says Brexit would lead to an economic shock – or recession – which would mean dramatic public spending cuts, job losses and years of financial insecurity for your family. • 9 out of 10 economic experts say our economy would be damaged. The value of the pound would fall, meaning the cost of your shopping and mortgage rates would rise, and the value of your home and pension would fall. • Overall we get more out than we pay in. Britain pays £5.7 billion a year to be a member of the EU Single Market, the world's largest free trade zone (Source: The Institute for Fiscal Studies) but the benefit of being in the EU is worth £91 billion to our economy.'⁹⁶ • The UK economy benefits from investment worth £66 million from EU countries – every day (Source: Office of National Statistics).'⁹⁷ |

⁹⁴ <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.N-vPZ1Ka0dU>

⁹⁵ <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.N-vPZ1Ka0dU>

⁹⁶ Source: Confederation of British Industry.

⁹⁷ www.strongerin.co.uk/get_the_facts#uVaMzl8HQGzFbcAr.99

| Issue | LEAVE | REMAIN |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Free movement of persons /immigration | <p>‘Since Poland and the other eastern European nations joined the EU in 2004, migrants have used the Union’s free labour movement rules to flood the UK. Poles are now the biggest immigrant group in Britain. Immigrants arriving in Britain from the EU outnumbered Brits heading the other way by a record 180,000 last year, placing unacceptable strains on housing, welfare and education. Lax border controls in other EU countries already make it easier for illegal migrants and terrorists to get into Britain, despite the UK staying outside Schengen. Now the EU wants Britain to take more refugees. Leaving the EU would allow Britain to regain control of its borders.’⁹⁸</p> | <p>‘Leaving the European Union would allow us to choose our own immigration policy; that is true; but it is not going to stop immigration. Asked by the BBC if the Leave campaign’s “chosen immigration” policy would actually guarantee to cut the number of immigrants, Boris Johnson carefully avoided answering the question.’</p> <p>Then on 19th June, he said; ‘I am pro-immigration, my friends. I am the proud descendent of Turkish immigrants. And let me stun you, perhaps, by saying I would go further. I am not only pro-immigration, I’m pro-immigrants.’ And these words from the leader of the “Leave” campaign that has suggesting that it would drastically reduce immigration to the UK.</p> <p>The fact is that if the British economy is to prosper, it cannot do so without recruiting large numbers of skilled and unskilled workers from other countries. If they don't come from our own continent, Europe, they will have to come from other continents.</p> <p>In no way will leaving the EU stop immigration to the UK. EU immigration is a great asset to the UK economy, and people from EU countries pay a lot more in taxes than they receive as benefits.</p> <p>Immigration is always an emotive issue that appeals to people’s sense of nationalism. It is easy, and sometimes satisfying, to blame others for our perceived ills. Of course, in the event of a Brexit, the economic downturn that will follow will make Britain a far less attractive country compared to other parts of Europe, we’ll all be poorer, and immigration from the EU will fall of its own accord. But that would really be an own goal.’⁹⁹</p> |

⁹⁸ <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.V-vPZ1Ka0dU>

⁹⁹ <http://about-britain.com/institutions/compare-brexite-arguments.htm>

| Issue | LEAVE | REMAIN |
|----------------|--|---|
| Membership fee | <p>‘Leaving the EU would result in an immediate cost saving, as the country would no longer contribute to the EU budget, argue Brexiteers. The leave campaign claimed that the UK was paying £20bn a year or £350m a week to Brussels and this could be saved and spent on the NHS. This was one of the key messages in the campaign. Some on the leave side acknowledged this was incorrect at the time and most subsequently have distanced themselves from the claim.’¹⁰⁰</p> <p>‘Last year, Britain paid in £13bn, but it also received £4.5bn worth of spending, says Full Fact, ‘so the UK’s net contribution was £8.5bn’. That’s about 7 per cent of what the Government spends on the NHS each year.’¹⁰¹</p> | <p>‘The claim that the UK sends £350 million per week to the EU is wrong. This is what we would send if it wasn’t for the UK’s budget rebate. The rebate is effectively an instant discount on what we would otherwise be liable for – the ‘gross contribution’. In 2014, the gross figure was £18.8 billion. Since it was negotiated in 1984, the rebate on the UK contribution has meant that the UK actually pays less than this hypothetical amount. The rebate can’t be changed in future without the UK’s agreement. The Treasury and the European Commission have both confirmed to us that the actual payment is the gross contribution minus the rebate. The actual payment is different from year to year, but last year’s was £250 million a week. The size of the payment varies from year to year. It was as high as £14.5 billion (£278 million per week) in 2013, and as low as £8.7 billion (£168 million per week) in 2009, according to the official EU Finances report published by HM Treasury. The figure for 2014 was marginally lower than in 2013, at £14.4 billion, while the projection for 2015 is that it will be £12.9 billion. This is £248 million per week, or £35 million per day, not £55 million a day as is sometimes claimed. The UK gets money from the EU budget as well, so the savings from leaving would be lower. The UK receives money back from Brussels in the form of grants and payments. These mainly go to farmers and poorer areas of the country such as Wales and Cornwall.’¹⁰²</p> |
| Law | <p>‘Too many of Britain’s laws are made overseas by dictates passed down from Brussels and rulings upheld by the European Court of Justice. UK courts must become sovereign again.’¹⁰³</p> | <p>‘The exit campaign has over-exaggerated how many laws are determined by the European Commission. It is better to shape EU-wide laws from the inside rather than walking away.’¹⁰⁴</p> |

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36641390>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit-0>

¹⁰² <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Leave-remain-the-facts-behind-the-claims.pdf> p.9

¹⁰³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/leave-or-remain-in-the-eu-the-arguments-for-and-against-brexit/>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/leave-or-remain-in-the-eu-the-arguments-for-and-against-brexit/>

| Issue | LEAVE | REMAIN |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Defence / Peace | 'Britain could soon be asked to contribute to an EU Army, with reports suggesting Angela Merkel may demand the Prime Minister's approval in return for other concessions. That would erode the UK's independent military force and should be opposed.' ¹⁰⁵ | 'European countries together are facing the threats from Isis and a resurgent Russia. Working together to combat these challenges is best – an effort that would be undermined if Britain turns its back on the EU.' ¹⁰⁶ 'It's an uncertain world out there.' 'Western democracies are under threat from a resurgent Russia, unrest around the Middle East, terrorism, nuclear rogue states. Is this really the right time to cut ties with your closest allies and create a new focus of international uncertainty? Britannia no longer rules the waves, and Britain is stronger working with France, Germany and the others within the EU on diplomacy, development and building democracy around the world. Washington wants Britain to stay in the EU and strengthen the European pillar of NATO. Outside the EU, Britain would lose global clout.' ¹⁰⁷ |

When analysing the above arguments, it is worth looking at them in the framework of the myths and countermyths described in section 2. Obviously, the strongest element of the debate was the issue of sovereignty (countermyth 1.). It appeared alone, as an independent argument, against the Brussels bureaucracy and the UK being better off representing herself in the United Nations and other international organizations and negotiations. On the other hand, it is not hard to notice that sovereignty is a cross-cutting argument of the Leave side in other issues as well. There is sovereignty in the 'law'-argument, saying that too many UK laws are connected to Brussels and that should be changed; in the 'defence' argument, saying that an emerging European army would erode the UK military force, and also the 'immigration' issue, saying that after leaving the EU the UK can gain back control over her own borders. The countermyth of lack of democracy (no. 2) was also an issue during the campaign. The narrative of the EU being an organization where the decision-making system is unclear, where the un-elected Commission initiates legislation, where national veto has been undermined and few people bother to go to elect MEPs (see Table 1.) reflect exactly the usual countermyth that was already being traditionally recited years before the Brexit campaign by one of the leaders of the Leave camp, Nigel Farage (UKIP).¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, the argument about the EU's weak leadership, the countermyth to the inability to act (countermyth no. 3) was not expressed explicitly. In issues where this argument could have been used (the slow reaction to the economic and migration crises), the narrative of sovereignty was applied (the UK being better off regaining independence and excluding the EU from the management of the economy and of borders).

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/leave-or-remain-in-the-eu-the-arguments-for-and-against-brexite/>

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/leave-or-remain-in-the-eu-the-arguments-for-and-against-brexite/>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-britain-leaving-eu/#.V-vPZ1Ka0dU>

¹⁰⁸ See section 2, countermyth 2.

Original EU myths seem to have appeared in the debate as answers to the arguments of the 'Leave' camp by the Remainers. The traditional argument behind European integration – securing peace (myth no. 1) – did not appear as an independent statement. It came up as a counter argument – if the UK leaves the EU then, in an age of multiple global threats and challenges, the UK should not loosen ties with the European continent. However, the original mission of the EU, as a tool to secure peace in Europe, remained invisible. The EU as a key to economic success (myth no. 3) became one of the central issues of the Brexit debate. While the 'Leave' camp argued that British economic interests could be represented much better outside the EU, especially in international trade negotiations, the 'Remain' arguments concentrated on the close ties of the UK economy with the Continent, the market of 500 million consumers and the threats of Brexit (inability to influence EU law, losing out in the financial markets etc.) Economic arguments also covered employment and immigration, the 'Leave' camp stressing the burden of intra-EU labour mobility and threats to the UK social system, the Remain camp arguing towards the needs of the UK labour market for foreign labour and drawing attention to the prospect that the UK alone will not be able to reduce immigration from outside Europe. Economy-related arguments also concentrated on the issue of the membership fee: while the 'Leave' camp argued that £350m a week to Brussels could be saved and spent on the NHS, the 'Remain' camp dissected this argument and called it at the very least misleading. Myth no. 2 on rationality, the EU being a technocratic cooperative did not appear in the debate.

IV Conclusions

I stressed in this article that political myths are key in the understanding of a political system. Since the EU is also a *sui generis* political system, I argued that it is possible to identify the myths that explain the existence and the nature of the EU. However, I also argued that this traditional understanding is challenged by countermyths that developed in the previous decades.

I pointed out that the unprecedented event in the European integration process, the referendum on the UK leaving the European Union can be fitted into this mythpoetical process. I identified the myths and countermyths in the arguments of the 'Leave' and the 'Remain' camp and found that the 'Leave' campaign stressed the countermyths (especially the ones on sovereignty takeover and lack of democracy) and argued against (economic co-operation and success) or ignored (peace and technocracy) original myths. Further research is needed to support the impression that the 'Remain' arguments were mostly responsive to the narratives of the other side.

Obviously, my approach is one of the many possible approaches to understand what happened in the UK on June 23 2016. Numerous other aspects are worth exploring with regard to Brexit: differences in turnout in various strata of the society, the historical roots of Brexit in British EU politics, the UK party system and Brexit, the campaign itself, EU institutional aspects, and the legal, economic and political consequences of Brexit for both the UK and the European Union, etc. My research, revealing the discourses and interpretations of the political debate in the UK on Brexit, may be continued in the direction of political culture. In this area, a special

phenomenon has been recently identified –post-truth or postfactual politics¹⁰⁹ that means that political debate is disconnected from details of policy, that certain political arguments are widely expressed and repeated even if they are found untrue. These theoretical developments may contribute to the understanding of political myths (where it is debated whether they have or have not an element of truth). We have to also add here that these recent developments do not only characterize Brexit – many commentators use the idea of post-factual politics to analyse the 2016 electoral campaign in the United States.¹¹⁰ As such, the interpretive framework of political myths I applied to the Brexit campaign discourse can be used to understand the changing nature of politics also outside the UK.

¹⁰⁹ Keyes, Ralph, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. (St. Martin's 2004, New York).

¹¹⁰ E.g. Jonathan Freedland (13 May 2016) 'Post-truth politicians such as Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are no joke' *The Guardian*; or Daniel W. Drezner, 'Why the post-truth political era might be around for a while' *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2016.