The Telegraph

European civilisation is in danger of succumbing to the EU empire

As we await details of the PM's deal, we should take a different look at our relationship with Brussels

By [Charles Moore](#)
5:00PM GMT 22 Jan 2016

Next month, unless there is a last-minute slip between Brussels cup and British lip, we shall be inundated with detail about **what David Cameron has won** from the EU. He will claim that his package will create the "reformed Europe" which he seeks. Indeed, he is saying it already, before he has actually got it.

Therefore, he will continue, the British people can confidently vote to remain in the EU. His Cabinet, though technically free to advocate a Leave vote, will all have endorsed his deal in advance, so any referendum rebels will be made to look self-contradictory.

There will be time to analyse the hectares (this is Brussels, so the word "acres" sounds wrong) of small print. Before that happens, I want to stand back and look at the European referendum choice from quite a different point of view. My question is: "Is the EU good for European civilisation?"

Here in Britain, we tend to think of the EU in a "transactional" way. We set off what we get out against what we put in, and calculate the profit and loss. (In literal financial terms, we lose about £10 billion a year.)

On the Continent, this is not how it works, though most member states fight hard for concrete national advantages. For the European elites, the EU is not a transaction, but a journey towards a new state of being. They may disagree strongly about policies, but not about the big idea. It is a case of "My Europe, right or wrong."

Their beliefs are not economic, but political. Indeed, even the word "political" does not fully express the thought. Their reasons are civilisational. To them, the EU is the solution to Europe's ancestral hatreds and power struggle, the only viable project for peace across the continent. They also see it as a way of perpetuating European values (behind which the old word "Christendom" still lurks) against tyranny and aggression – for example, Putin's Russia and **growing Islamism**.
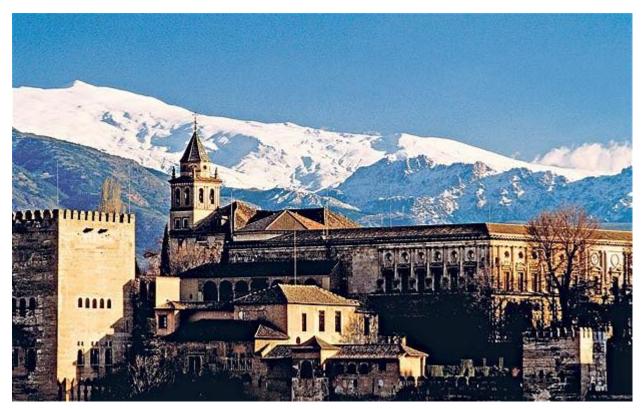
Putin's Russia: a country of tyranny and aggression Photo: AFP/EastNews

If they are right, should Britain stand aside all the same? Should we say – as some Eurosceptics always have – that the continent means only trouble for us? Should we rate our freedom to decide our own destiny so high that we need not worry what happens across the water?

I reckon not. Much as I want to get out of the EU, I would not vote Leave if I thought that, by doing so, we would make it harder for European civilisation to survive. Different though Britain is, in many ways, from its neighbours, it is **a part of European civilisation**. The wider Anglo civilisation of North America, Australia etc is closer to us, obviously, than, say, Italy or Greece, but that, too, is European in character, though not in geography.

In this sense, we have no choice. We are European, so we would be mad not to **want the best for Europe**. When we so famously stood alone in 1940, it was not because we didn't care about the fate of Europe, but because we did.

The Alhambra in Spain: many would argue that this Muslim structure is the most beautiful in the world Photo: ALAMY

So is it true that the EU reconciles Germany and France, makes the powerful countries respect the small ones and secures new entries into the democratic fold? It would be odd flatly to claim that it does not, when so many member states retain their faith in it. It is striking that virtually all the countries which threw off the Soviet yoke in 1989 either are, or want to be, in the EU.

It won't do just to jeer: "Yeah, well they want the money, don't they?" They do – and what's wrong with poor countries wanting more money? – but they also see it as a place of greater safety. If you are a Pole, you are just as patriotic as any Briton, but you live in a place which the distorted patriotism of others laid waste. As Putin ravages Ukraine, you start to imagine that it could happen again. One has to respect these feelings.

But the EU's claims about what it has done need closer inspection. It is not true, for example, that it assured post-war peace. The main peacemaker was the Nato alliance, especially the determination of the United States to rebuild Germany and hold back Soviet communism. It was Nato, operating through leaders like Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl, which later created the conditions in which the Berlin Wall could come down without the world falling apart.

Guards try to control the crowds as the Berlin Wall comes down Photo: GETTY

By contrast, the EU's price for the reunification of Germany – the creation of the single currency – has been the most destabilising act in the history of Europe this century. Germans nowadays tell Greece (and Spain and Portugal and Italy) what to do – not because they have the evil intent of old, but because the euro puts them in charge of the zone's money. The "European Germany" which Kohl wanted thus becomes indistinguishable from the "German Europe" which he feared.

This development shows something else. The EU is a funny mixture of being too strong – imposing regulations, telling member states how to run their economies, ignoring its own laws when it suits it, thwarting the results of referendums and even elections – and too weak – lacking the mechanisms to manage members' debts, determine tax policy, punish transgressions or defend itself.

It is not a dictatorship, but an empire, in a world where other empires have disappeared. One of its oddest claims is that the future cannot consist of nations. Yet all the main players of the future are sovereign nations – China, India, America, the countries of the old Commonwealth.

When a real crisis arises, the EU cannot act. It failed in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and finally had to let the Americans come to the rescue. Today, some say the EU is more vital than ever, because of Russian adventurism. But the miseries of Ukraine suggest that the EU cannot successfully fill the vacuum created by President Obama's abandonment of American strength.

When the Schengen area of open borders was created 30 years ago (with Thatcher's Britain opting out), the idea was to give reality to the shared space which the dreamers wanted to become the United States of Europe. As we are now seeing, this cannot survive the arrival of hundreds of thousands of mainly Muslims refugees from the Middle East. Yet the response of the Schengen area – and the eurozone – to every shock is to try to reinforce what already isn't working. The EU suffers from imperial overstretch.

Mr Cameron rightly makes much of the fact that Britain is a member of neither Schengen nor the eurozone, yet does not follow his own logic. If we benefit from not being in the key features, what is the continuing reason why we should be in the thing at all? The EU is a journey, not a steady state, and the 21st-century evidence is that it is travelling in the wrong direction.

I don't want the EU to fall apart, because I fear chaos. But I do want it to reverse its imperial direction, which ultimately imperils European civilisation. For a Eurosceptic, the referendum debate is about whether this can be achieved only by getting out