

Euro-twaddle or Tolstoy? You choose your poison...

By Roger Bootle



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Last week, Michael Gove's wife, the journalist, Sarah Vine, divulged what the Justice Secretary was reading while agonising over the coming referendum. As well as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, we were told, he also read my own *The Trouble with Europe*. I hope that my humble wake-up call of a book helped him to make his momentous decision.

It certainly helped me. For when I was researching the book, I was not sure which way I would vote. Moreover, the Prime Minister's Bloomberg speech in January 2013, in which he clearly and honestly laid out what was wrong with the EU and what needed to be done to fix it, I found uplifting. It was clear how many people across the EU wanted radical reform and indeed how much the EU desperately needed it. If the UK's renegotiation were to deliver this, I reasoned, then not only should most eurosceptics support continued membership, but Britain's actions would also have served to bring great benefit to the rest of Europe.



In the event, David Cameron's "renegotiation" produced a mouse. His mantra that Britain is better off in a "reformed EU" is completely beside the point. The EU is not being reformed. Not only are the concessions to the UK minor, but the issue should not be about concessions to us at all. It should be about the essential nature of the enterprise. History reveals that the EU is set on a path towards a United States of Europe. Even when the EU Commission encounters setbacks, this merely delays its progress and/or prompts it to disguise its inner purpose.

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When the proposed European Constitution was rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, you might well have thought that this spelt curtains for the Constitution. Oh no. The European bureaucrats proceeded to implement the changes that had been embodied in the Constitution, but simply omitted to use the C-word.

Similarly, when Ireland voted against the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, another referendum was called and the vote was duly won. Where is the legality in that? Who approved the notion that the Irish should be compelled to go on voting until they said yes?

This has a critical bearing on the security of the deal Mr Cameron has wrung from our EU partners. It is not clear that it is legally watertight until the European treaties are amended. More importantly, regardless of the legal position, while the EU remains essentially the same, you can bet your bottom euro it will be trying to undermine the British deal somehow or other.



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What it would require for Britain's position to be truly secure is for the EU either to give up the idea of becoming a United States of Europe, or to be genuinely happy with the idea that, while some member states did indeed proceed to greater integration, others would not. They would have separate currencies, separate fiscal arrangements and independent political institutions – and that would be fine and dandy. There is no sign whatever that the EU or its leading personalities are happy with this Europe à la carte.

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The euro remains critical to this whole issue. In the long run, despite our safeguards against being dominated by the eurozone, it is doubtful that the UK could ever be comfortable being inside the EU but outside the euro.

Of course, it is no longer possible openly to argue for UK membership of the euro. But don't imagine this means that the former advocates of euro membership have changed their tune. Plenty of people now urging the UK to stay in the EU originally wanted us to join the euro – and they still do. They are simply lying low. They will probably show their true colours if and when the referendum decides the UK should stay.

I suspect that through a series of small but incremental moves, the EU would then make Britain's position more and more uncomfortable outside the single currency. The result would be that, before too long, all the usual suspects would argue openly that there was no point being inside the EU but outside the euro. Britain's self-interest would demand that we go the whole hog.

And we would be in a weak position to resist pressure. It has been difficult enough for Mr Cameron to wring the most pitiful concessions out of our European partners, even with the threat of Brexit hanging over them. Imagine what Britain's bargaining position in Brussels would be after we have voted to stay in.

Naturally, you don't hear anything about this from the "Remain" campaign. In recent weeks, it has sought to broaden the base of its arguments. One of these is designed to appeal to those of an altruistic disposition. If Britain were to leave, it is alleged, this could cause grave damage to the EU, destabilising the whole of Europe. Accordingly, it is our duty to stay in. Moreover, we can then use our influence for the good of all.



This argument is misconceived. Inside the EU, we don't have much influence. We are one of 28 members. We are shackled. By contrast, if we were to leave and to prosper, this would indeed give us enormous influence over the EU. In short, to use a technical term, it would put a rocket up it. In that event, we would have rendered the peoples of Europe a great service.

The "Remain" camp has also tried to appeal to baser instincts. Outside the EU, it would supposedly be more difficult for our Premier League to attract top international players. Meanwhile, our much-cherished cheap flights to holidays in the sun would be imperilled.

I wouldn't be surprised soon to hear that if we left the EU our climate would deteriorate. If you believe this guff, you will believe anything.

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