

Brexit - Fraying union

By Richard Milne
in Copenhagen and
Peter Spiegel in Brussels

AP PHOTO



In this Sept. 24, 2015 file photo, European Council President Donald Tusk (right) welcomes British Prime Minister David Cameron upon his arrival at the EU Council building in Brussels. Earlier this month Tusk unveiled proposals that he hopes will keep Britain in the 28-nation European Union

Across 'core Europe' and the Nordic and eastern blocs Eurosceptic parties are gaining support. Countries such as Denmark say it would be even harder to keep voters on the EU path without Britain inside the club.

Every week, the Danish People's party, a rightwing populist movement that last year vaulted to second place in the general election on the strength of its anti-EU policies, holds a meeting in Copenhagen to plot long-term political strategy.

Traditionally a session dedicated to furthering the party's anti-immigration and law and order platform, in recent months another topic has risen to the top of the agenda: how to exploit Britain's June 23 referendum on EU membership. "We have been looking very much at what is going on and preparing for this outcome," says Peter Skaarup, the party's parliamentary leader.

Those preparations involve more than just weekly meetings. In recent years, the party's leadership has made annual pilgrimages to Britain to study how Euroscepticism became part of the mainstream dialogue in both of the country's largest political parties.

Many of those lessons have now been internalized. Much like David Cameron, the British prime minister who has officially advocated staying in the bloc after renegotiating his country's relationship with the EU last week, Danish People's party leaders now talk openly about their own renegotiation with Brussels.

"We are not withdrawalists as a party, but we want to have a new deal with the EU," says Morten Messerschmidt, who won a seat in the European parliament after the party topped all others in Denmark's 2014 EU elections, with 26.6 percent of the

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vote. "We are happy that a big country such as Britain is talking about taking back sovereignty and is willing to make the final sacrifice."

Denmark is seen as one of the countries most vulnerable to contagion if Britain were to vote to leave the EU. In many ways, the Danish are the most British of continental Europeans when it comes to Brussels, delaying its EU membership until the UK became a member in 1973 and remaining the only other country with

an "opt-out" of the EU requirement to join the euro.

Denmark is hardly alone in harboring political movements that wish to leave the EU.

The failure of most of Europe to pull out of its post-euro crisis economic funk, coupled by the largest influx of refugees in more than a generation, has left mainstream parties across the continent under siege. Some fear a British exit would push many of these countries over the edge, sparking louder calls for copycat referendums

that could begin to unravel the great postwar European project.

Although EU leaders believe Scandinavia and the "Visegrad Four" countries in central and eastern Europe - Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic - would feel the most immediate pressure from a British exit because of longstanding anti-EU sentiment in those blocs, leading voices from "core Europe" are now lending support for similar ventures.

In the Netherlands, a founding member of both the EU and the euro, Geert Wilders, whose far-right Freedom party has held a commanding lead in national polls for months, recently said a British exit would make it easier for his country to leave the EU - something he promised to deliver should he become prime minister.

"The beginning of the end of the EU has already started," he said last month. "And it can be an enormous incentive for other countries if the UK would leave."

In France, another member of the EU's founding six, the far-right National Front, which like the Freedom party is also leading in polls ahead of a presidential election next year, has promised a British-style referendum over EU membership within six months of coming to power.

"Until now, the EU has only enlarged itself. Brexit would prove the EU is not an inevitable plan," says Florian Philippot, the National Front vice-president. "Soon people would also realize that the UK lives well without being part of the EU. That there would be no economic collapse, no chaos."

The noise has begun to reverberate so much that Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, confessed this month that he was "really afraid" Britain's referendum would prove "a very attractive model for some politicians in Europe to achieve some internal, very egotistical goals".

Indeed, José Manuel Barroso, the former European Commission president who oversaw a near doubling of EU membership during his 10-year tenure, warns that Brexit could lead to an EU "détricoté", or unravelling, like the single thread pulled from a sweater that causes it all to come apart.

Though the recent euro and refugee crises have spurred an anti-EU backlash, they have also produced an EU that is more integrated than ever. Agreements were forged

Brexit - Fraying union (continued)

on several common institutions to shore up its single currency and protect its borders. But that integration is no longer just institutional.

The crises have also created a European electorate far more cognizant of actions taken outside their own country. Finnish voters were acutely aware their tax money was bailing out Portugal in the midst of their 2011 national election, for example, just as Germans are now following refugee flows in Greece on a daily basis. Aided by social media, that newfound connectivity has meant political trends now hop borders at frightening speed. The very idea of national referendums is a case in point.

In an EU context, plebiscites were once limited to major constitutional issues like treaty changes. Now, they are legion. Denmark voted in December against adopting EU justice and home affairs policies; while Greeks voted down the terms of a third eurozone bailout in July. The Netherlands will decide whether to approve an EU trade deal with Ukraine in April and just this week, Viktor Orban, the Hungarian prime minister, said his country would hold a referendum on EU migration policies.

Although Poland, Hungary and Slovakia have recently become troublemakers on certain issues, many EU leaders believe an aping of the British example in the east is unlikely. The countries still receive billions in development funds from Brussels, and being part of the European "club" remains a strong motivating factor for countries recently freed from Soviet imperialism.

"These funds are used locally to stabilize the political power system," says

“The cornerstones of Europe - euro, Schengen, EU institutions - are breaking up, and if the politicians of the EU don't begin to listen [...] maybe the whole thing will break up.

MORTEN MESSERSCHMIDT



In this file photo British Prime Minister David Cameron (right) listens as German Chancellor Angela Merkel answers a media question during the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference in London on February 4

Gordon Bajnai, Hungary's former center-left prime minister. "Losing the EU funds would be a disaster for any regime that is trying to perpetuate itself, as they do in Hungary and some other central and eastern European countries."

But Scandinavia could be more problematic. Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister, says a protracted divorce negotiation would likely throw out an endless number of British-backed ideas for recreating a separate northern trading bloc akin to the system that existed before the UK or the Nordic countries joined the EU.

"In theory, you could see Europe splitting along the lines of what was there in the late 1950s," Bildt says. "I don't think that would

happen, but you might have tendencies in that direction."

A further unraveling once Britain left is not inevitable. Barroso suggests that a Franco-German led group of "core countries" would announce an immediate initiative for deeper integration as a way to signal to the world - and to wavering EU countries - that Britain was an outlier and those remaining were committed to pulling together at an even faster pace.

A similar strategy was discussed by senior leaders during last year's Greek crisis as a way to fend off market vigilantism in the wake of a possible Grexit.

But Bildt notes that rising anti-immigrant sentiment in Germany, France and the Netherlands means "the core Europe is not as stable as it used to be", a view shared by some in the core itself.

"I am a firm believer in the EU, but I think that the elites' traditional sermons no longer work," says Hubert Vedrine, a former French foreign minister. "They even infuriate people and are counter-productive."

Barroso says he does not rule out simultaneous developments: some countries moving towards closer integration while a handful of threads on the

“It's far more toxic now to say you support Merkel over Cameron.

LYKKE FRIIS
FORMER DANISH MINISTER

periphery get pulled out of the sweater entirely.

"The leaders of the core countries may be willing to show to the world, 'We are going ahead, indeed we are going to reinforce our steps. [Without Britain], now we can do more, so let's go for that,'" he says. "At the same time, there will be populist, xenophobic movements that will say: 'We should have a referendum in our own country'."

Like many northern EU countries, Denmark's choice within Europe has long been what Nicolai Wammen, a former defence minister, termed "taking the boat to England or the bridge to Germany". In the immediate postwar years, picking between the two emerging EU powers seemed no choice at all. Britain was not only a victor of the second world war, but was seen as a counterweight to growing West German economic power.

In 1963, Copenhagen was given the chance to join the EU without the

UK but decided to wait for London. But as Britain has gradually disengaged from Europe, and Germany's economic and foreign policy has come to dominate inside the EU, Copenhagen has chosen to forge closer ties with Berlin.

Much of Europe has remained uneasy with Germany's mounting power, however, and that resentment has been evident in Denmark during the refugee crisis, where many blame Chancellor Angela Merkel for exacerbating the influx by "inviting" migrants into Europe. "It's far more toxic now to say you support Merkel over Cameron," says Lykke Friis, a former minister.

Most officials in Copenhagen expect a vote in favor of Britain leaving the bloc would lead the Danish government to commit itself decisively to the EU, particularly if, as Barroso expects, a "core Europe" attempts to redouble integration efforts.

The bigger question is whether the public would do the same. The Euro-

sceptics' victory in the referendum on joining some of the EU's common legal and policing policies on a case-by-case basis - something the UK already does and which had the backing of the country's establishment parties - offers a cautionary tale.

"The Danish experience is very clear that you can have a referendum where a huge majority in parliament advocate a Yes and the Danes say No," says Wammen.

Kristian Jensen, the Danish foreign minister, says convincing voters to keep on the pro-EU path would be even harder without Britain inside the club. Many Danes see the UK as a critical ally on free trade and common market issues as well as some of the restrictions on welfare payments to migrant workers Cameron was able to win as part of his renegotiation.

"It's important for us to have allies outside the eurozone. It will be more difficult for a country like Denmark if it doesn't have an ally like Britain," says Jensen.

For the Danish People's party, that would present a historic opportunity - but also a significant risk. Skaarup admits that while a new bloc of UK, Norway and Switzerland outside the EU could present an alternative to Danish voters, Brexit would leave Denmark without its natural partner in the EU.

"We would like to take advantage of both positions," he adds.

Messerschmidt sees a British exit in more apocalyptic terms, saying it follows in the wake of other EU crises that have revealed a weak, splintering European edifice.

"The cornerstones of Europe - euro, Schengen, EU institutions - are breaking up, and if the politicians of the EU don't begin to listen to the population maybe the whole thing will break up."

That may not have been Cameron's intention when he first promised Britons a choice on whether to remain in the EU three years ago. But it may turn out to be his legacy.

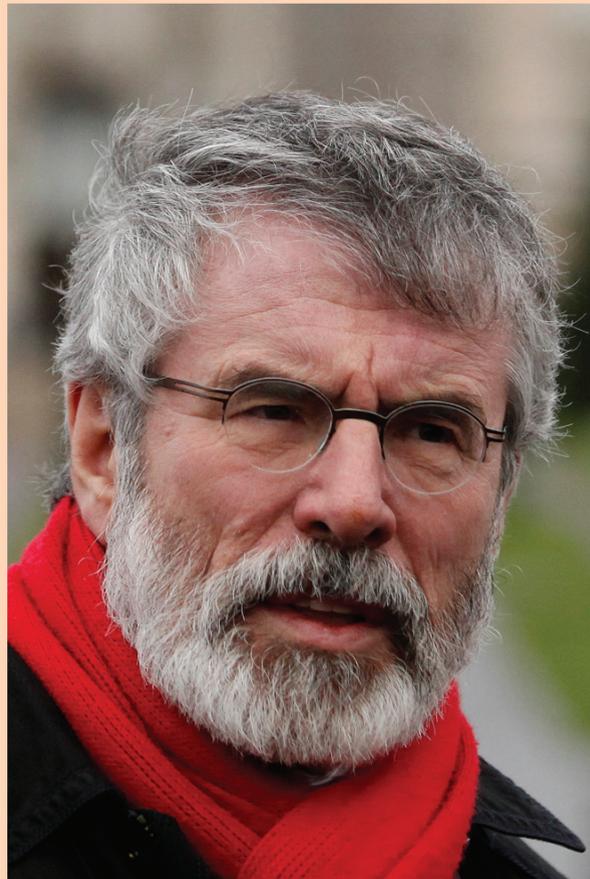
Additional reporting by Anne-Sylvaine Chassany in Paris and Henry Foy in Warsaw



Irish Prime Minister, Enda Kenny



Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin



Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams

By Shawn Pogatchnik in Dublin

Ireland's 3 political tribes share bloody past, eye on power

THE three Irish parties emerging strongest from last week's election — Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein — all claim to be the one true church of Irish nationalism. Each claims direct succession from the Dublin rebels who challenged British rule in the Easter Rising of 1916.

These forces are still vying for power as Ireland prepares to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Rising, Ireland's opening salvo in its successful war of independence from Britain. Here's a look at those parties — and their bloody pasts.

IN THE BEGINNING

Once upon a time, Ireland had a Sinn Fein party that sought to wrest the island from the United Kingdom.

But that party, founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith, was torn in two in 1922 amid civil war following Ireland's acceptance of a treaty with Britain that offered autonomy, not full independence.

Sinn Fein leaders who accepted the treaty became Fine Gael; those who tried to overthrow it, Fianna Fail. And those left behind in the new U.K. territory of Northern Ireland spawned a new generation of militants who, decades later, claimed the Sinn Fein mantle as their own.

The three Irish political parties today differ less on policy — all promise no more austerity, tax cuts, better housing and health services — than on mutual enmity. It remains to be seen who will swallow

their pride and compromise, or whether the trio will stay separate and Ireland will face a second early election.

FINE GAEL

"The Tribe of the Irish" has a martyred father figure: Michael Collins. He fought in the Rising, oversaw Sinn Fein fundraising, led IRA intelligence operations and a Dublin hit squad during the 1919-21 War of Independence, joined Griffith in negotiating the treaty with Britain that ended the war and established the Irish Free State, and was assassinated by former comrades the following year.

■ The three Irish political parties today differ less on policy than on mutual enmity

Collins' pro-treaty camp routed anti-treaty forces and won all elections from 1923 to 1932 as its anti-Fianna Fail posters warned voters they must keep "the shadow of the gunman ... from your home." But since then, Fine Gael never again has won back-to-back elec-

tions as it positioned itself as the party of law, order and Roman Catholic virtue.

Fine Gael has regained power only in alliance with Labour, the party of Ireland's unions. That partnership has helped Fine Gael evolve into a more socially progressive force open to ending bans on divorce and gay marriage and permitting abortions when doctors deem a woman's life is at risk.

But Labour suffered heavy losses as results came in Saturday, and Fine Gael has conceded it has few options besides turning to Fianna Fail.

FIANNA FAIL

"The Warriors of Destiny" were founded in 1926 by Eamon de Valera, who had commanded a rebel unit in the Rising, became Sinn Fein's president in the wartime rebel government, broke with Collins over the treaty and championed a disastrous civil war that created bitterness for generations.

Initially determined to observe a Sinn Fein boycott of the new Irish state, de Valera ultimately led most Sinn Fein activists into his new party and parliament — and in the process became Ireland's most dominant political figure of the 20th century.

With heavy doses of free-spending populism, Fianna Fail

won the most parliamentary seats in every general election from 1932 to 2011, although it didn't always win enough to block the Fine Gael-Labour alternative. Fianna Fail never has stayed long in opposition and proved surprisingly resurgent again Saturday, drawing nearly even with Fine Gael barely five years after being blamed for bankrupting the country.

While Fine Gael supported a minority Fianna Fail government in 1987-89, Fianna Fail has never returned that favor and still calls its opponents "Blueshirts," a reference to Fine Gael's flirtation with Fascism in the 1930s.

SINN FEIN

Today's party is technically Provisional Sinn Fein, a breakaway movement formed in 1970 in the Northern Ireland capital, Belfast, amid the rise of Catholic-Protestant street violence and the deployment of British troops to support the police.

The new Sinn Fein initially served as the public face of the outlawed Provisional IRA, a paramilitary group bent on overthrowing Northern Ireland's Protestant government and forcing the territory into the independent south. The Provisionals pursued a deadly feud with former colleagues in what was rebranded the Offi-

cial IRA and Sinn Fein.

The Provisionals' most politically savvy commander, Gerry Adams, transformed his Sinn Fein faction over two decades into a well-organized, highly motivated political party. In 1983, while still reputedly serving as an IRA commander, he was elected Sinn Fein president, a position he still holds today at age 67. In 1986 he ended Sinn Fein's refusal to take seats in the Irish parliament, though it took another 11 years to win one.

Adams helped deliver 1990s IRA cease-fires that allowed Sinn Fein to become increasingly palatable to northern Catholics, who have made the party their dominant representative in a Northern Ireland coalition government with Protestant leaders.

Gains have taken longer in the Irish Republic, where successive Fine Gael and Fianna Fail governments banned Sinn Fein's northern brogues from the airwaves until 1994.

Throughout this month's campaign, Adams has faced repeated questioning about his IRA past and unsolved crimes. While this week's rise to third place represents another breakthrough for Sinn Fein, many analysts think the party would do better if it permitted a new generation with no Provisional background to take charge. **AP**

Brazil: Activists denounce sewage in Rio de Janeiro waters

ACTIVISTS alleging that decades of neglect and authorities' repeated failure to make good on cleanup promises have effectively killed one of Rio de Janeiro's most iconic waterways staged Saturday a symbolic burial of the Guanabara Bay, the sewage-filled waters where Olympic sailing competitions are to be held.

The demonstration was held on one of the city's most polluted beaches, Botafogo, which is enveloped in a sulfuric stench, dotted by household trash and looks out over the iconic Sugarloaf Mountain. Protesters placed a garbage-filled mock coffin on the fetid sands, which they also draped with black cloth.

The event's organizer, biologist Mario Moscatelli, said the event was among last-ditch efforts to force state authorities to keep their promise of cleaning up the bay before the Aug. 5-21 Games.

"This is an environmental cri-



Activists protest next to a mock coffin and a toilet symbolizing the burial of the Guanabara Bay

me," said Moscatelli, wearing chest-high rubber coveralls and industrial goggles as he waded out into the dark waters to pluck out floating trash. "If this is happening here, at the

picture postcard symbol of Rio, imagine what's happening in the interior of the country."

He added that around seven months ago he denounced Rio's state water utility, Cedae,

for flooding the bay with untreated sewage. Moscatelli has several videos shot near the site of the protest showing a tidal wave of sewage pouring out from a Cedae facility and into

the waters of Botafogo Beach. As neither federal nor state prosecutors have taken any action on the matter, Moscatelli said he intended to bring his complaint again.

Sewage pollution has become a major issue in the run-up to the Olympics since last year, when The Associated Press published the results of an independent study showing astronomical viral levels from untreated sewage in all of Rio's water venues, where 1,400 Olympic swimmers, rowers, sailors, canoeists and triathletes will compete.

In Rio's Olympic bid, authorities pledged to drastically reduce the amount of sewage flowing into the bay before the games, but with very little progress to date, officials here now acknowledge the targets won't be met.

Athletes have expressed alarm over not only the sewage but also floating trash,

which could potentially cause catastrophic accidents or cost teams medals. Earlier this week, the local O Globo daily ran a photo of what appeared to be a severed arm floating in the bay, but the details behind what happened were unknown. **AP**

Ship that ran aground off Antarctica freed, researchers safe

AN icebreaker carrying researchers that ran aground off the coast of Antarctica was freed by crew Saturday and was afloat again, the Australian government said.

Some 37 researchers on

board the Aurora Australis were taken safely ashore on Friday via a barge. The ship's crew stayed behind and used a combination of internal ballast transfers and work boats during a ri-

sing tide to refloat the ship, the Australian Antarctic Division said in a statement online.

The icebreaker got stranded after it broke its mooring lines during a blizzard last week and

ran aground on rocks in Horseshoe Harbor.

The ship was in the vicinity of Mawson research station, where crew will inspect the ship for damage. There was no sign of oil pollution, the

statement said.

The Australian Antarctic Division said it was consulting with other national Antarctic programs to figure out a way to transport the researchers back to Australia.

On Friday, a spokesman for the U.S. National Science Foundation told the Times Union of Albany that a ski-equipped cargo plane from the 109th Airlift Wing would fly 2,250 kilometers across Antarctica to retrieve the researchers if weather permits. **AP**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



CAN CATS SEE COLOUR?

MANY people ask me if dogs and cats can see colours. Because there is no form of two-way communications with cats and dogs, it can sometimes be difficult to determine what they see.

The only way to accurately describe the sight of cats is to actually examine the eye using modern science as a hitch. And while most cat owners would like to believe that their cat has the ability to see them clearly and in colour, the cat was simply not formed to exist in that manner.

SCIENCE OF THE EYE

The main component of the eye that is related to color is the retina. The retina is an outlet of nerves that contains both cones and rods. The cones work by taking in light and changing the images into colour. That message is then sent to the brain and the concept of colour is realised. Rods, on the other hand, take in light from the eye

and contrast the image into black and white.

The theory of cats being able to see color is directly related to the amount of cones and rods that are present in the retina. However, modern science has recently been able to determine that cats have a much higher amount of rods in the retina than they do cones.

What this means is that because cats do have cones in the retina, they do have some ability to see color. However, in comparison, cones in the retina of cats only account for roughly 20%. The other 80% consists of rods. This means that the ability to see color exists, but the ability to differentiate colors probably does not exist.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EYES

From as far back as the history of the cat can be traced, cats have always been hunters. They lived and survived



in the wilderness by hunting at night and keeping themselves concealed during the day. The eyes were a great asset because they had the ability to see in much brighter contexts at night. This was essential to their survival.

It is important to understand that the ability to see color was never a necessity for the survival of the cat. In a dark and wooded forest, the cat had a limited use for colour; only bright contrasts that would allow him to successfully hunt his prey.

Hope this info sheds some light on the topic
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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