

Brexit - an autobiographical essay.

first version (21 June 2016)

Preface

This is a first draft of an essay on the referendum that will be held on the question of whether Britain should remain a member of the European Union, which will be held on the 23 of June (in two days time). I am not going to vote (and I am actually glad that I can't as I will try to explain) because although I am a British citizen I have not voted in UK elections since the 1980s. This means that I cannot vote but both my mother and sister, my brother in law, a nephew and a niece will all be voting. I have spent quite a lot of time thinking about this matter. Originally I planned only to write about my views but of course the natural question came to my mind: why should anybody be interested in reading about them? After all, I am a professional mathematician in an area unrelated in anyway to the matters I will be discussing. I have a doctorate from Oxford, and have taught at universities in US, Japan (for more than 20 years) and now in Poland but have no formal credentials in economics, politics, international relations or history, which is what I will be writing about. Nevertheless I think my background, experience and reading make my point of view unusual and perhaps interesting so I thought I should first explain where I come from and how I arrived at my views. This lead me to give this essay a autobiographical character. I started writing about my parents, my youth in Poland, emigration to the UK, the main intellectual influences that affected my views etc. I had to combine this with the main topic but I also gave myself a deadline: I wanted to finish at least a day before the referendum. There is little time left and the essay is still in a very unsatisfactory form: it is rambling, disjoint, full of stylistic and grammatical errors and probably other things that I hope to eventually correct. I intend to keep rewriting it even after the results are known. I will periodically post new versions here.

My background and family

The latest polls on Brexit the result of the referendum will be very close and is hard to predict. A few days ago the Leaves seemed to be winning clearly but now the pols have tightened. Perhaps the murder of the Labour MP Joe Cox has had an effect. In any case, the Leave side is clearly doing vastly better than most people predicted when the Referendum was called. I can confirm this from my personal experience: both my mother and my sister, who were once in favour of remaining are now likely to vote for Leave. This fact is one of thousands that demonstrate the absurdity of the Remains attempts to present the Leaves as a bunch of little Englanders, Putin supporters or xenophobes.

Our family emigrated to the UK from Poland in 1968 as a consequence of the communist-lead antisemitic campaign in Poland (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Polish_political_crisis) and became naturalized British citizens in the 1970s. When we arrived I was 15 year old, my political views were social democratic (I was soon to be cured of that by the experience of Britain of the Wilson, Heath, Callaghan years) and, not

surprisingly in view of the circumstances of our leaving, we were hardly susceptible to any kind of nationalistic arguments. Although the quality of life in Britain even at that time was incomparable higher than in communist Poland, we soon became acutely aware of the acute and growing disparity between Britain and continental Western Europe. There years after our arrival in UK the family of my father's brother (except for an aunt my father's only relative who, like my father survived the Holocaust in remarkable circumstances) was permitted to emigrate to Switzerland and I became a frequent visitor at their flat near Zurich. In those days life in England could be described by the phrase "railway strike today, general strike tomorrow and who knows what kind of strike on Wednesday". By comparison with shabby British stores, bad food, small cold houses, unreliable cars, trains that were always late and the general atmosphere of pessimism bordering on despondency, Continental Europe: France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy looked almost like Britain had looked in comparison with the dreariness of communist Poland like Britain compared with communist Poland.

In Poland my father had been a professor of agricultural economics at Warsaw's most prestigious economic university (at that time renamed by the communists as the Main School of Statistics and Planning, now back under its pre-communist name). He was born in a Hassidic community in a town in Western Ukraine that was inhabited by Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles. In 1939 the town found itself under Soviet rule as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. German invasion of the Soviet Union took place when he was about to begin studies at Lvov University. He tried to follow the retreating Soviet Army on a bicycle but when that proved impossible made his way to Poland's capital Warsaw. By quite a different route his younger brother managed to escape and the two met in Warsaw. With the help of sympathetic Poles they obtained false documents (with different surnames, which they kept after the war). Besides one aunt (who survived by being hidden in an underground pit by Polish peasants) all other members of my father's large family perished in the Holocaust. He himself avoided detection (in spite of some near misses) and in 1944 participated in the Warsaw Uprising as a member of the Polish underground Home Army, loyal to the Polish government in exile in London (his Jewish origins were not known to any of his fellow fighters). He took part in some of the heaviest fighting of the uprising and managed to survive its fall by swimming during the night to the bank of the Vistula river that had been occupied by Soviet forces. His younger brother also survived in a remarkable way: by going to Germany under the disguise of a Ukrainian voluntary laborer (it helped that he spoke the language perfectly).

During the war my father turned to Marxism and welcomed the the communist take over. Fortunately for his later state of mind it did not do him any good, for during the Stalinist period his wartime Home Army membership always counted against him and his application for Party membership was rejected and his academic career stalled. Still, it was his desire to contribute to the building of socialism that lead him to abandon his original enthusiasm in mathematics for economics. Khrushchov's speech in 1956, which revealed the true nature of Stalinism put an end to my father's Marxism. During the short lived liberal "thaw" initiated by the coming to power of Władysław Gomułka he was a "revisionist" who believed in the possibility of gradual transition to social democracy. He was able to join the Party which made it possible for him to obtain the chair of Agricultural Economics at SGPiS. By the time

I became interested in politics he was no longer even a social democrat. His one year visit to USA under a Fulbright scholarship in 1966 turned him into all out admirer of the United States and its market capitalism. He was in all respects strongly pro-American and in particular regarded the war in Vietnam as a necessary and noble effort. My mother was very different. She came from the poorest Polish peasantry. Her mother died early, her father, whom I remember from my childhood, was illiterate. Her above average ability having been noticed by a schoolteacher who arranged for her to get a scholarship which made it possible became the first of her family to go to high school on the eve of the war. When the Germans occupied in Poland in 1939 they ordered all high schools to close but many went underground and she was able to continue her education in secret. In 1942, however, her younger sister received an order to travel to Germany for forced labor so she went instead. She escaped at the first opportunity and survived the war in Warsaw, where she had witnessed both the Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Her story, like that of many Poles who lived through that period is full of shocking episodes in which both the best and the worst aspects of human nature were displayed. She met my father after the war, when she was studying economics at the SGPiS. The marriage of a Jew from Ukraine, who did not learn to speak Polish until high school and the daughter of Polish peasants would have been to say the least, extremely unlikely before the war.

Although she was able and educated my mother was never an intellectual and always retained a high degree of scepticism about unrealistic and utopian ideas. Thus, although she was a member of a social class favoured by the communists, she never felt any attraction for marxism and always viewed communism a foolish dream. On the other hand, she always felt sympathy for and solidarity with the poor and a distrust of the “undeserving rich”, which became the basis of her antipathy to the Tories after we emigrated to Britain. My younger sister was like my mother in her pragmatism and distrust of abstract ideas not firmly rooted in experience. In Britain she became a successful dentist (owner of a dental surgery) and married an Englishman. My own inclination were always quite different: intellectual with a strong interest in abstraction. From quite early days I had two favourite academic subjects: mathematics and history. Unlike many professional mathematicians, I did not arrive at my interest in mathematics because of an interest in science and the physical world - it was the result of my fascination for pure abstract reasoning, objective and unsoiled by human passions, prejudice and “official orthodoxy”, which plagued almost all other intellectual disciplines under communism. History, which however ancient, always had a political dimension, was had a greater emotional impact but that was both a cause of pleasure and suffering, from which mathematics could provide a relief. That basically is the story of my intellectual life. But as a career neither history nor any subject in the humanities and social sciences seemed to me attractive because of their lack of “objectivity”, which seemed rooted in their nature but under communism also had a very practical manifestation in the form of academic careers.

My father was of course the biggest influence on me in my early years but that is not to say we always agreed, either before or after emigration. While I accepted my father’s critical view of communism, I was in those days strongly affected by “progressivism” with the “arrow of history”, and many other marxist influences. This is the reason why I find almost every speech by Obama doubly irritating: once on its own intrinsic demerits and once

because it reminds me so much of my own way of thinking, which I outgrew at the age of 15, albeit with the help of circumstances that I did not control.

My interest in history

A significant thing is that my historical and political interests in my Polish childhood did not much involve England or the United States. I was interested in ancient history, primarily Roman, and then Napoleonic France. This kind of fascination was fairly more common in Poland (for which the Napoleonic period was the most important for the formation of national identity) in a somewhat earlier period, so there was no shortage of books both in Polish and translations, of which I read practically everything. I even went as far as sending a letter to the French Embassy in Warsaw asking for some materials I could not get. I was about 13 at a time and as all correspondence between Polish citizens and foreign embassies was monitored by the Polish secret police, so in recent years I sometimes wondered if any record of this remained. Surprisingly the Embassy replied and even sent me a book about Napoleon's son but they did not have anything that I was really interested in.

In those days I read voraciously both in Polish and Russian (a language I learned even before I reached the age at which it was compulsory at school) and was passionately interested in politics. Before 1968 my view of the Eastern European communism was critically but I believed that it could be repaired (one of the things I disagreed about with my father). But in retrospect I would call my outlook of those days can be called "bonapartist" rather than socialist. My views were very much like those of Napoleon portrayed Andrew Robert's "Napoleon the Great": the man who believed in meritocracy (except perhaps in the case of his relatives), centralization and regulation of everything by enlightened, dedicated and public spirited bureaucracy. This seemed to me than as obviously the only sensible and indeed, scientific way of running all affairs. I viewed Soviet socialism as a failure because of its of destruction of freedom, which I believed was necessary for human progress, and its preference for political loyalty over strict considerations of merit but I thought it obvious that state centered "scientific" and "rational" approach directed towards achieving the common interest was always superior to one based on chaotic and selfish individualism. My father, however, had a long time ago discovered the importance and effectiveness of market forces (although at that time his knowledge of market economics was limited) and we sometimes discussed it.

Emigration.

The year 1968 changed our lives. It was for me a tremendous shock and radically transformed my view of many things (which I will not discuss here) and made anti-communism perhaps the main single ideological idea that guided me until the collapse of the Soviet Union. We left Poland by driving to Vienna through Soviet occupied Czechoslovakia (my father had resigned his Party membership in protest against the invasion) and eventually ended up in Britain, where my father got a position as a lecturer in economics at Polytechnic in the Midlands. It was quite a quite a demotion in academic status, from the chair of Agricultural Economics at one of Poland's leading universities to a basically a teaching

position at a minor college but there was little interest in the economics of Eastern Europe in Britain at the time. My father had really always wanted us to live in the United States, but this proved more complicated and more time consuming than he could afford. He had good offers from two German universities but that time the idea of permanently moving to Germany and having his children become Germans was even more unacceptable. A partial compensation for him was a research association with an Oxford College, which enabled him to continue research and publishing on Eastern European economics until his death in 1984.

Living in the free world, in addition to all the practical challenges of adjusting to a new country, learning a new language, etc, offered both great advantages as well as some difficulties. From the point of view of my intellectual development the most significant was complete access to everything that has been written on practically any topic. Once I was able to read English fluently enough I read both works of literature that were banned in communist Poland, which meant mostly explicitly political works such as Zamyatin's "We", Orwell's "Animal Farm" and "1984", as well as a vast amount of classical literature, a lot of which was not actually banned but simply difficult to get, for reasons not necessarily directly related to politics. For my father the most important thing was his discovery, rather late in life, of Keynesian economics, which was held an almost unchallenged sway at British universities at the time and which seemed to him to provide satisfactory answers where Marxism had failed.

Britain in the 60s and 70s

In the late 1960s and early seventies Britain was very different from now and the differences between all kinds of aspects of life there and in continental Europe were much greater than today and to me almost all of them appeared unfavorable to Britain. In fact, these differences were of two essentially unrelated kinds but at that time I did not see it in this way. On the one hand there were those things that derived from Britain's relative isolation and different tradition (which I did not yet fully understand), on the other hand there were things that were direct consequences of the socialistic character of the pre-Thatcher economy. Some of the former such as Imperial Measurements have disappeared, others, such as driving on the left, British faucets etc, British food etc, continue to plague tourists. The latter, such as frequent strikes, trains that were always late, poorly made cars, student grants, student's being able to collect dole during vacations, were only a feature of the pre-Thatcher socialism and are now gone. In addition there are things that are more profound but which I did not then understand: the Monarchy (very different from the surviving continental ones), Common Law, lack of written constitution and even the notorious British class system. My view of the items in the last group (except the class system) has changed greatly but at that time I saw them all as manifestations of British backwardness and obsolescence.

The issues that agitated Britain at the time of our arrival were not very different from today. The foremost was immigration. A bout two months after our arrival Enoch Powell made the famous speech in Birmingham in which he warned of the consequences of unchecked mass immigration. A distinguished classical scholar and a former professor of Greek at the University of Sidney, Powell quoted Virgil's Aeneid, which involved a prophecy of disasters

to come in the form of "the River Tiber foaming with much blood". The speech caused a huge uproar and was interpreted as literally predicting "rivers of blood" that would result presumably from the future civil war. My English was still not good enough at this time to understand the point but about a year later a school friend who was taking classics explained to me Powell's the origin and the meaning of the allusion. Although I did not consider us a part of "mass immigration" (only a handful of Polish Jewish refugees who left Poland in 1968 were admitted to the UK), my feelings about Powell were negative, but once I understood the point of the speech I realized the man was far from the rubble rouser that the media made him out to be. I always continued to have mixed feelings about Powell: somewhat accidentally he influenced the change in my views of economics but I always considered his relatively sympathetic view of Russia, his downplaying of the threat that communism represented and his anti-Americanism as evidence of his ignorance and parochialism.

My political views were evolving in the direction quite different from Powell's, though eventually this process would result in a somewhat better appreciation of some of his ideas.

The other big issue of the early 70s was Britain's membership of the European Economic Community which led to the 1975 referendum. On this issue I and my father took opposite sides. For me it was obvious that Britain should join. I think my main motivation was security - the United States was in a period of weakness following the defeat in Vietnam and Soviet Union appeared to be at the peak of its power. Economically too, Britain looked trapped in an inescapable process of decline and joining the EEC seemed like the only way to escape it.

My father's views were quite different. Although he greatly admired America and American capitalism, he was very distrustful of the European version, particularly in Britain. While all of us detested the left of the British Labour party for its often pro-communist stands on international issues and for its anti-Americanism, my father tended to side with them on economic issues. He saw the EEC in the same way as left wing politicians like Tony Benn saw it: as good for the British and European financial and industrial interests but bad for the working and middle class. Of course the other leading opponent of joining the EEC was Enoch Powell.

My intellectual development

Probably the single most important formative influence on me in these days was my discovery of "Encounter", a magazine formed by Europe's leading anti-communist intellectuals. I subscribed to it until its demise in 1991, when, with the fall of communism it had accomplished its purpose. By reading encounter I discovered Raymond Aron and Elie Kedourie - the two thinkers who had the stronger influence on my thinking on politics at that period, and through Aron I discovered Alexis de Tocqueville. Almost paradoxically, it is two French thinkers that actually helped me understand the exceptional nature of both

American and British political tradition and culture. Through Elie Kedourie I discovered the political thought of Lord Salisbury (and that led to Roger Scruton and *The Salisbury Review*). Eventually such things as the Monarchy, the lack of written constitution, the Common Law, etc would change in my mind from symptoms of British backwardness to things worth preserving. That, together with the changes that took place in Britain during the 41 years between the referenda explains my change in attitude.

The Brexit Referendum

When the referendum took place we were still unable to take part as our naturalization process was completed only later in the same year. In 1975 I was in the first year of my doctoral studies (in mathematics) at Oxford University. Naturally the EEC referendum was a much discussed subject and my impression was that at least at Oxford there was an overwhelming support for yes, with the opposition coming almost entirely from people with left wing views or (which was of course not the same) working class background.

It was certainly hard to imagine then that 41 years later there is another referendum on the same issue, and even harder that my own view would change so much. Like in 1975 I am not going to be able to vote. Having spent most of the years after 1980 living in United States and Japan (and recently in Poland) I have not voted in any UK elections for over 20 years, which make me ineligible. My father died a long time ago but both my mother (who is 92) and my sister will vote and both have told me that they would be voting for Leave. The fact that my sister, a very practical, successful and moderate person has decided to vote that way seems to me particularly significant. In a way I am glad that I do not have to make the decision myself because it would be one of the hardest I have ever had to make. There are people who I respect and admire on both sides of the debate and the same is also true of the people that I detest (George Galloway is for Leave but equally despicable Gerry Adams is for Remain). For example, two of the British historians that I most admire Andrew Roberts (with whom I think I have only once found a reason to disagree and that concerns the question of whether Napoleon or Davout were right in their dispute at Borodino) and Niall Ferguson, who I consider probably the best economic historian ever, are on the opposite sides. Edward Lucas, who was one of the very few Western journalists to recognise the true nature of the Putin regime essentially from the beginning (a view that I also shared) and the economist Anders Aslund, who is one of my oldest friends (we met at Oxford in late 1970s, when we were both working on our doctorates) are both supporters of Remain, while admirable Colonel Richard Kemp is leading a charge of the Leaves on Twitter. Tom Stoppard, for whom I have a great admiration and affection (his “Jumpers” is probably my favourite modern play) has expressed his support for Remain, typically citing the fate of Eastern Europe as the reason, while my favourite contemporary philosopher Roger Scruton has always been on the Leave side. I sometimes wonder what my two principal “intellectual mentors” in politics Raymond Aron and Elie Kedourie would say. I suspect that Aron, after carefully considering the strongest arguments of both sides would cautiously come out on the side of Remain, with the caveat that should Leave succeed both EU and Britain should try to do everything to minimize the adverse consequences. I am more convinced that Elie Kedourie would back Leave, since so

many the illusions behind its creation are very similar to those he criticized in British Middle East Foreign policy in “The Chatham House Version” and elsewhere.

The Arguments

As I wrote above: I am glad to have a good excuse not to vote this time. I see strong arguments on both sides and bad ones on both sides. Unfortunately there have been a lot more of the second kind on both sides. But there seems to me a clear difference in this respect between the Leaves and the Remains. While on the Leave side the bad arguments have generally come from the kind of people of whom one would expect it, I have been shocked to see so many normally intelligent, knowledgeable and honourable people stooping so low. Whatever the result of the referendum, this fact will not be easily forgotten and will affect British intellectual life for many years to come. I do not mean only the almost comic scaremongering claims like the ones that Brexit would cause an economic crisis greater than the Great Depression, or the commonly repeated claims that post-Brexit Britain would be “reduced to irrelevance”, become “isolated little England”, or would be less secure from terrorism. There has also been scaremongering on the other side. What distinguishes, however, the anti-Brexit scaremongering and the accompanying threats and bullying is their peculiar illogicality of the kind: “in order to discredit our opponents we have to present our own side in the worst light possible”.

The Logical Problem of the Remains

The reason for that is, of course, that the Remains start with an unresolvable logical dilemma. They want to present Brexit as a greater threat to Britain than to the EU. But the all the terrible consequences which they predict, could only be the result of deliberate actions by the what remains of the EU after Britain’s departure (which, as I shall argue below, will not in any position to take them). Clearly if all sides behave rationally, British exit from the EU should lead after a period of negotiations to a new arrangement that would minimize its effects. This would be of course good for Britain, but also essential for the survival of the EU. But the Remains cannot possibly admit this, of course. Not only would admitting this help the Leaves, but the idea that Britain could get such an agreement would be infectious - for the dirty secret of the European Union today is its large and growing unpopularity in the key countries (paradoxically the EU is most popular in Poland and Hungary - the two member countries with most euro-sceptic governments).

The threats of economic war and “irrelevance”

Thus numerous arguments are produced as to why Britain cannot not expect an agreement like Switzerland or Norway or completely new one, that fits its size and importance. The mildest quasi-threats take the form: “you will have to abide by the rules but will not be able to participate in making them”. Well, clearly Switzerland and Norway prefer this state of affairs to full membership so there must be something that they value more than than this “participation in making the rules”. The implied threat is that the EU will choose to make

rules unfavourable to Britain and Britain will have to accept them. Why? Well, one answer that is given is that the EU accounts for a much higher proportion of Britain's trade than Britain for EU's so that the EU will be able to bully Britain as it pleases. This stupid and dangerous argument only serves to strengthen the image of the EU as an imperialistic block that treats trade as a form of warfare whose purpose is to enrich its own members and impoverish and ruin the outsiders. In fact, this is exactly the argument that was used in the 1930s to justify Japan's expansion that led to the Pacific War. A small island country lacking natural resources, it was argued, cannot survive by mere hard work, innovation and trade because the other powers will gang up against it and force it into poverty and weakness. Expanding and forming one's own block ("The Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere") therefore the only way to avoid "irrelevance". "Irrelevant" is another word beloved by those who favour this line of argument. If Britain leaves the EU it will become "irrelevant". Of course since most people realise that Britain is about the only country in Western Europe with a serious military and that this fact has become much more "relevant" than used to be thought not that long ago. But we are told that there is no problem because of Nato. Except that Nato has now been attacked not just by Donald Trump but the current German Foreign Minister Steinmeier.

One of the people who have disappointed me most in relation to this whole issue is Poland's former Foreign (and earlier Defence) Minister Radek Sikorski. Sikorski, who is 10 years younger than me, was a student at Oxford two years after I left after finishing my doctorate (I got a Royal Society- JSPS post-doctoral Fellowship in Japan). Since he read PPPE rather than mathematics, he mixed with very different type of people than I did, which left him with a better British accent than mine but, I would argue, surprisingly poor understanding of British institutions and especially of the national character. He numerous statements on Brexit presumably were intended to help the Remains but if they have had any effect it much more likely to have been the opposite. Sikorski has frequently spoken about various ways in which EU countries would try to damage the interest of Britain after it had left the EU, carefully avoiding the suggestion that it was actually proposing such a course of action. As a former British citizen and married to one, Sikorski always speaks as friend of Britain who is concerned about British interest but has never shown any indication that he any understanding of the real issues motivate the millions of Britons (including my mother and sister). According to Sikorski it is all either due to hostility to Polish immigrants or the fact that:

"Having lost an empire, the British have been at a loss for a new role. There is another nascent empire, just across the water, yearning to be led. If only the British would realize it."

Well I have news for Mr. Sikorski: most of the Leaves do not care about any empire, old all new. What they care about is the ever increasing loss of freedom that people used to take for granted 30 years ago, the ever increasing intrusion in to their lives of rules which they cannot do anything about because they are made by people whom they have never elected and cannot remove, shocking levels of all kind of crime, the loss of civility the constant lying about things that they can see with their own eyes. The reasons for this are complex and not everything can be blamed on the EU, but neither threats of "irrelevance" nor dreamy images of a "new empire" will help. Amazingly all the years Sikorski spent living in Britain did not

teach him an important lesson about the British: threats usually have the opposite effect on them of what is intended. Particularly that the threats are clearly empty. The European Union is not in a position to enter into any kind of “war” with Britain, and certainly not if Britain was forced to fight back. EU already faces a deep crisis of confidence, in fact anti-EU political parties are close to power in Austria, Scandinavia, The Netherlands and France. In Germany AfD’s support is growing by leaps and bounds. Then there is Eastern Europe, about which more below. Britain’s departure from EU will lead to an even greater dominance by Germany, this in turn will lead to a greater resentment of Germany. Now imagine that not only Russia but also post-Brexit Britain decided, in self-defence, to encourage and support centrifugal forces in the EU. Under such conditions anything, even an Anglo-Russian alliance like the one in 1812-1815 would not be unthinkable.

The bogeyman

Some of the Remain scaremongers realise the irrationality of these threats so they try a slightly different approach . Rather than, in the manner of Kim Jong Un, try to persuade everyone that they themselves are crazy and are willing to blow the world and themselves up, they imply that someone else just can’t wait to do it. The favourite is the head of the European Commission, the former prime minister of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker. Everybody in Britain seems to hate him, that he is a really nasty, anti-British piece of work, seems to be the one thing the Leaves and the Remains agree on. So the Remains argument goes like this (and I have read it more than once): Juncker is such an anti-British swine that out of pure spite and vengefulness he will do everything possible to damage us after Brexit, no matter how bad the consequences. So we had better stay in.

Everyone is against Brexit

Another line of argument involves attempting to show that the only supporters of Brexit are enemies of Britain, chiefly Putin (more about this below) and that all traditional allies and especially the most important one, the United States, oppose it. This was the reason because one of the most foolish moves by the Remains: inviting Obama to speak against Brexit. The fact that Obama was probably the last person who could actually persuade anyone who did not already favour Remain to do so was somehow not noticed. Moreover, the current US president has even less understanding of the British character than Mr. Sikorski: the speech contained a threat that “Britain would go to the back of the queue” if they wanted a separate trade deal with the US. The reaction to the speech was predictably negative (the fact that the US president used the purely British word “queue” made it only worse as it suggested that the speech had been written for him at Downing Street) and the polls immediately after it showed a movement towards Leave.

Anne Applebaum is a respected British journalist, the author of a well regarded book on the history of the Gulag. She is also the wife of Radek Sikorski and strong support of Remain. Responding on Twitter to a criticism of Obama’s speech she wrote that while she did not herself like Obama, the views he expressed were universally held by Americans on all sides, both Republicans and Conservatives. I have no idea if she really believed in what she was

writing, but whether it was self-deception or a “white lie”, it seemed to me quite typical of the behaviour of many of normally intelligent and well informed Remain supporters. Only a day or two later, the Wall Street Journal published an editorial criticising Obama’s Brexit speech. The Financial Times journalist Henry Foy reported this on Twitter in the following words: “*Murdoch-owned @WSJ urges British readers to “ignore Obama” and his views on Brexit*”. Mr Foy writes frequently on Polish politics and his articles are invariably popular among those on one side of the Polish political spectrum and detested by those on the other. However, unlike the mercenary hacks who work for the Wall Street Journal, Mr Foy is a man of integrity and no one would ever suggest that his articles are in any way influenced by the interests of the proprietors of his newspaper.

When it became clear that the Americans are by no means uniform in their views of Brexit, another approach was tried. Brexiters are just British equivalents of Trump supporters and, in particular, the leader of the unofficial leader of the Brexit campaign Boris Johnson is “Trump with a Thesaurus”. Unfortunately for this argument several conservative American publications have now published articles backing Brexit and these (e.g. “The National Review” and “The Federalist”) happen to be among the staunchest Trump opponents. See <http://thefederalist.com/2016/06/20/brexit-welcome-britain-to-our-revolution/> and <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/436853/brexit-vote-restore-british-democracy-vote-leave>

As for Trump himself, he did criticise Obama’s speech but, not surprisingly, it turned out that he had no idea what “Brexit” meant or what the entire issue was about.

The Putin argument

Another frequently heard argument is “Putin supports Brexit”. This is not only doubtful but also involves a non-sequitur. Even if Putin really does support Brexit it does not follow that he is right and that Brexit would turn out to be advantageous to Putin. In fact, there are only two ways in which it could turn out to be so. One way, is if the EU acts essentially in the way Napoleon did, essentially forcing England and Russia, who had very little in common, to become allies. The other, and more likely one, is that Germany faced with increasing opposition among the restive countries in post-Brexit EU will choose to ally itself with Russia. This is far more likely and far more threatening than any supposed sympathies between the British Leavers and Putin’s Russia. In fact, one can see a striking double standard on the way this issue is being treated by the pro-Remain media. When Boris Johnson appeared, rather ambiguously, to assign some of the blame for Russian annexation of Crimea and aggression in Eastern Ukraine on the EU he was roundly condemned in the strongest terms. In fact, in my opinion, the EU carries a great deal of the blame - because of its long policy of appeasement of Putin and overlooking and justifying Russian aggressions and brutalities in Chechnya, in Georgia, in Moldova, the murders of journalists, the destruction of independent media etc. My view of Putin has been unchanged since the Moscow apartment bombings helped to bring him to power, essentially all European leaders and most journalists and “Russia experts” (Edward Lucas being an outstanding exception) repeatedly chose to avert their eyes when what was before them did not fit the idea on which they were basing

the future of their new post-cold war Europe (and idea that shares a lot with Obama's "arrow of history" view of foreign relations that has wrecked such a havoc throughout the world). Even Britain ignored until it could not longer do so, the assassination on Litvinenko, and action unprecedented in modern history in its brazenness. But when the German foreign minister blames NATO for the current tensions with Russia in terms indistinguishable from what appears on numerous Russian propaganda sites and in comments by Russian trolls on social media, the same people who attacked Boris Johnson are silent.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36566422>

In fact, Radek Sikorski who attacked Johnson on Twitter in a mocking and patronising manner, did not see any problem with combining that with his own criticism (at almost the same time) of the new Polish president Andrzej Duda for choosing not to become the only foreign head of state besides Kazakhstan Nazarbayev to attend Putin's victory parade on the 9th of May 2016. That, according to Sikorski, would have been an admirable example of "realpolitik".

In fact, of course, Brexit is of no importance to Russia and other enemies of the West. What is important is that the coalition that held during the Cold War should break down and the longer the fight over Brexit lasts, the more bitter it becomes the better. If Brexit were followed by a new agreement that would actually strengthen European collaboration, Russia would of course, oppose Brexit.

My conclusion

This brings me to my conclusion where I want to present my own perspective on the whole issue. There are certain things that seem clear to me. Firstly, that the dangers of Brexit are far greater to the EU, especially to the newer member countries, than they are to Britain, all the scaremongering notwithstanding. Secondly, the struggle in Britain will not end until the British people feel they have regained complete control of their own laws - this is a point on which I completely agree with the Leaves. Thirdly, the greatest danger to Europe is not Brexit or even the French Front National but the kind of thinking represented by Steinmeier and his party.

If all the main actors could be assumed rational, Britain leaving the EU and then negotiating a new agreement would be the ideal solution. This would almost certainly be followed by other countries re-negotiating their status. Assuming rational behaviour, far from destroying European collaboration it would strengthen it. The current EU is built on a utopian recipe for endless strife. An illustration of this was given recently when almost simultaneously the president of Poland Andrzej Duda stated that "Europe is based on Christianity" while the president of Germany, Gauck stated that "Europe is based on Enlightenment". Of course the word "based" is vague enough for a dozen more such statements to be equally true and false. The concept of Europe as a distinct geographical and cultural entity emerged in the 16th century, that is during the Renaissance, and in fact, it replaced the previous concept of Christendom. The Enlightenment took place in the 18th century and influenced just as much the founders of the United States (especially Franklin and Jefferson) as Napoleon. But, of

course so did Romanticism and Counter-Enlightenment to which much of the European right wing and conservative thought derives from.

Again, Britain is the exception, her own unwritten constitution was essentially formed in the 17th century and Common Law goes back to Middle Ages. In other words, “Europe”, is a complex intellectual construct, which has always contained numerous strands which gave rise to various political movements: liberalism and conservatism, christian democracy and socialism. To state that only one of these strands is really Europe is to force the followers of the others to become “enemies of Europe”.

Returning to the immediate issue of the Brexit referendum: more important than it’s outcome is the Second English Civil War should end with as little damage as possible. How can this happen? The only way I can imagine it ending is rather like the first one ended. In 1660, general George Monk, one of the best military commanders of the English Commonwealth, facing the strife that followed the death of Oliver Cromwell and the short period of incompetent government by his son Richard, decided to enter in negotiations with Charles II. This eventually lead to a restoration of the monarchy but on terms that preserved all the achievements of the revolution. In fact, it took one more upheaval (the so called Glorious Revolution of 1688) before a permanent settlement was reached, but the basic idea of the settlement was formulated in the Declaration of Breda of 1660. The present day analogue would have to mean that whoever wins the Referendum on the 23, ought to make maximum concessions to the other side. This, however, appear to be much easier if the Leaves win then if the Remains to. In the latter case the struggle is likely to continue and there is a serious danger that it will get worse.

Looking at things from my British perspective I would therefore vote for Leave. But I have another perspective, the Polish one, which propels me in the opposite direction. To explain it however would require quite a long section about the current political, economic and security situation in Poland. I intend to write this eventually but clearly I am not going to have time for it before the 23rd. In fact, overall, I am lead to what I stated earlier: I am glad I do not have to make this decision. However, as I have tried to indicate: the debate so far has greatly affected and changed how I view various people, in a way that is quite similar to the effect that Donald Trump’s success in the Republican primaries has had on my view of various American conservative intellectuals and politicians, some of whom I now admire much more than I used to but in most cases much less.

Finally here is brief list of what I think are among the best articles on the issue of Brexit on both sides that I have read recently and (this is significant) are freely available.

Pro-Brexit

1. Andrew Roberts on why economic arguments are not the most important ones - I agree.

<http://capx.co/napoleons-challengers-didnt-fear-brexit-and-nor-should-we/>

2. Andrew Roberts on why Americans should support Brixit.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/britain-and-obamas-back-of-the-queue-1466201544>

3. Andrew Roberts on Cameron's and the Remains distortion of history

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3582109/Cameron-s-travesty-history-PM-know-s-bunkum-say-Brexit-raises-threat-war-just-shows-panic-No10-says-historian-ANDREW-ROBERTS.html>

4. Roger Scruton explain what to me is the most important argument: the deep and fundamental difference between Common Law and laws derived from the Napoleonic code. Exactly what I would have like to have written here but it would take too long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bvlg8YK3iSU>

Anti-Brexit

1. Niall Ferguson's article which unfortunately is not free any longer (it was once):

<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/comment/regulars/article1669873.ece>

there is a not necessarily totally impartial summary of the article here:

<http://www.breitbart.com/london/2016/02/21/scottish-ex-pat-niall-ferguson/>

and a reply here by Robert Salisbury:

<http://capx.co/niall-ferguson-and-bruce-anderson-are-both-wrong-to-oppose-brexit/>

2. Niall Ferguson's short economic argument:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/04/18/the-happy-moron-and-brexit/U7T4jpfKOHjWW3DXyAX7HL/story.html>

3. Dalibor Rohac presents probably the best economic case against Brexit. He is probably right but of course he cannot answer the non-economic arguments of Robert's and Scruton. Rohac has written other very good articles and a book on the need to reform the EU (<http://www.towardsanimperfection.com>) but again they are only partly relevant to the concerns of pro-Brexiters.

<http://www.iea.org.uk/blog/i-used-to-be-a-eurosceptic-heres-why-i-changed-my-mind>

