

Britain Has Voted Out, and Europa Is Weeping

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This is the feeling of the axis of history tilting: not a smooth, mechanical turn, but the ground shifting and trembling beneath your feet. What even yesterday seemed so solid is now running through your fingers like silt. The possibilities that gave you hope have vanished behind a cloud, and now there is only a single gloomy road of decline stretching out ahead of you.

The events of 24 June have reminded me again of the gap between rational thought and emotional reaction. I have spent the last three years thinking and writing about Brexit, enumerating the likely outcomes and their probabilities. Yet none of this prepared me for the gradual onset of despair over the morning as the referendum result became clear. Nigel Farage declared British independence day, David Cameron announced his resignation, and Donald Tusk began making reference to the 27 Member States of the EU.

It seems absurd to hold such an attachment to a remote bureaucracy, but the EU is so much more than that. Europeanness is a fundamental component of my identity. Certain things make me define as British, and I am still engaged in the tricky question of what it means to be English, but I have a very clear sense of what Europe means. It means peace and solidarity after centuries of conflict. It means celebrating a cultural diversity that is nonetheless embedded in common traditions, especially those of the Greco-Roman world. Above all, it means quasi-religious redemption for the sins of our pasts, the promise of universal equality, liberty and fellowship. These things are much more than a set of regulations and directives, but even so they are represented and safeguarded by the European Union.

Today, I feel as though that identity has been stolen from me. This is not just because Britain will now invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and spend a masochistic two years divesting itself of its EU membership — although this will, in effect, involve the forced confiscation of EU citizenship from the 16 million individuals who voted Remain. It is also because the whole of Europe is now diminished; the dream of international cooperation has evaporated into mist.

Europa is weeping, and I am weeping with her.