

High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus to the UK: “A Brexit would not be in the interests of the Commonwealth”

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If Britain chose to leave the European Union, it would not only have an effect inside the UK, but also on the rest of Europe. In the final month of the referendum campaign, we will be featuring comments from some of Europe's Ambassadors to the UK on how they view a potential Brexit. [Euripides L. Evriviades](#), High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus to the United Kingdom, writes why Brexit would not be in the interests of the Commonwealth.



Cyprus does not have a say in the EU referendum. But as partners in the EU and in the Commonwealth, we do have an opinion as to how a possible Brexit might affect Cyprus-UK relations and our entire European family. Our position is clear: the UK should remain in the EU. We need a strong UK in a stronger EU to address collectively the multitudes of challenges facing us. In a globalised world, we are joined at the hip. And we are all in the same strategic boat.

Cyprus' stance during the crucial European Council negotiations was constructive and creative with one goal in mind: not to jeopardise the unity and the cohesion of the EU. We believe that Prime Minister Cameron achieved a very positive deal that makes the EU more democratic and accountable and enhances the Union's competitiveness. Reform is an ongoing process. And a reformed EU is good for Europe as a whole. It safeguards the interests of all European citizens. The EU has been and is a force of good for Europe and for the world. It has been keeping the peace and security on the continent which historically has only known wars and mayhem.

Our supportive stance is not unpremeditated. Cyprus and the UK have a strong bilateral historical if not an umbilical relationship. Approximately 250,000-300,000 British citizens of Cypriot origin live in the UK; thousands of Cypriot students and others study/work in the country; tens of thousands of Britons live as permanent residents in Cyprus. Almost every Cypriot I know has lived or studied in the UK, or has children or relatives living here. Millions of Britons have visited Cyprus as tourists or lived and worked there for a period of time. All these will be affected one way or another with a possible Brexit.

According to the electoral procedure, all Cypriots living in the UK are eligible to vote since Cyprus is a member of the Commonwealth. We are not hiding. We are openly calling for all Cypriots living in the UK to make their voice heard by registering and voting.

Throughout history both of our nation islands, albeit of different size, geography, historical experience and narrative, have always looked outside their shores to trade goods and ideas. Cyprus has consistently been in the top fifty export markets for the UK. And the UK is the second largest trading partner of Cyprus. A possible Brexit would have adverse effects on trade between our two countries. The UK would have to negotiate a new trade agreement with the EU and this could take years.

A possible divorce is not an easy straight forward affair. The largest tourist market for Cyprus is the UK with arrivals exceeding 1 million in 2015. This grew by nearly 25% in the first four months of 2016. A weaker sterling and possible other unintended unpredictable collateral outcomes, will definitely affect this sphere as well.

Our bilateral relationship continues to expand and evolve through our participation in the single market. A possible Brexit means that the UK will no longer be part of the single market which is, let us recall, a British invention. Trade will continue, but under substantially different terms.

I will give just one concrete example: between 2009 and 2013 Cypriot exports to the UK more than doubled despite the stable or slightly negative tourist arrivals which again picked up in 2014-2015. The percentage of services both exported and imported between Cyprus and the UK is currently around 20% for us.

Our common membership in the EU has opened up new vistas of cooperation between our two countries, thus taking the relationship to a substantively new level. As EU partners, we are also working together to tackle the challenges facing us including regional instability, migration, terrorism, asymmetrical threats and energy security to mention but a few. Cyprus in partnership also with the UK is a predictable partner and a security producer in the pivotal Eastern Mediterranean. On financial issues, our positions are also very closely aligned.

Our joint membership of the Commonwealth demonstrates the historical bonds and shared values of the two countries; it complements our EU partnership. A possible Brexit will also affect the entire 53 member states of the Commonwealth. Only Cyprus and Malta will remain to promulgate within the EU the Commonwealth agenda.

As my Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides stated during his recent visit to the UK: “It is not in the interest of Cyprus for the UK to leave the EU for many reasons, mainly financial but other ones as well. It is neither in the interest of the Commonwealth to have a Brexit, because the Commonwealth benefits from the British presence in the EU, as the UK is in the forefront of policies such as tackling climate change, pursuing sustainable growth etc. Therefore, I call upon our compatriots in the UK to seriously support the UK remaining in the EU. The EU which is facing so many challenges must be reinforced and not weakened by exits”.

Given these deeply entrenched ties the Cyprus government would not want to see the UK outside the EU. And we say so publicly without this being interpreted as if we are interfering in the internal affairs of the UK. At the end of the day the people will decide; and it is never wise to argue with the outcome of democracy. But from our perspective, unity makes all of us stronger. Let us not fragment ourselves at a time when unity is essential.

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About the author

Euripides L. Evriviades

Euripides L. Evriviades is High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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