

# The European Parliament and the UK's renegotiation IV: what do MEPs think?

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*Debates about the future of UK-EU relations have paid little attention to the European Parliament. There have been no studies comparable to those that have looked into how member states view the [renegotiation](#) or might respond to a [Brexit](#). [Media reports](#) indicate that the European Commission taskforce handling the UK renegotiation has even looked into ways of avoiding the Parliament becoming involved. Questions persist, however, as to whether the Parliament can be ignored. If Britain votes to leave then the EU Treaty's withdrawal clause guarantees the Parliament a say in the final deal.*

*To find out the views of the European Parliament BrexitVote is running a series – compiled by [Tim Oliver](#) – in which MEPs from across the Parliament set out what they think of the UK-EU renegotiation, the idea of Brexit and – most importantly – what role they think the Parliament will play. In this, the third part of the series, we hear from MEPs in the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left and Greens/EFA groupings.*



European Parliament, Plenary hall

## **Dr. Dennis de Jong MEP (Netherlands), Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left**

The main political groups in the European Parliament are clearly advocating an ever closer union, despite all the political crises the EU is facing at the moment. If we are genuine, as I am, in our conviction that the UK should remain a member of the EU, we should have the courage of admitting that instead of an ever closer union, we should aim at achieving an EU that is really adhering to its motto 'unity in diversity'. Only by allowing for a more flexible form of participation for not only the UK but for any Member State that wants to stay out of part of the EU-acquis, will the EU be able to rebuild trust among the citizens in Europe.

If it came to a withdrawal of the UK, I reckon that a majority in the European Parliament would try to make sure that no concessions would be made to the UK which would make a similar withdrawal a feasible option for other Member States. Instead of discussing why the gap between the British people and 'Brussels' had become as big as it did, the European Parliament would probably try to isolate the British case as being an exception due to the specific geographic position of the UK.

All in all I do not see the majority in the EP as a trustworthy guardian of the interests of the British people.

## **Ska Keller MEP (Germany), Greens/EFA.**

Brexit is one of the most defining European topics this year. It has potentially drastic consequences but yet it feels as if the only directly elected body of the European Union, the Parliament, has nothing to say about it. Cameron presents his reforms to the heads of states and governments only; trying to reach for deals in backroom meetings. Cameron is not coming to Parliament to present his cards. Probably that's better for him because a parliamentary debate would show very clearly the weakness of his vision of Britain in Europe. But for European democracy, this is bad. While it's the people in the UK who have every right to decide if they want to leave or not, those who might be left behind should at least be heard. And our colleagues from the UK and from different parties should have the possibility to explain their opinion to the whole chamber.

We Greens would feel very sad if the UK were to leave. We also see a need for reform in the European Union, but certainly not the same reforms as Cameron is proposing. We want to strengthen people's right, ensure higher social and environmental standards throughout the Union. We want to make it more democratic and more accountable. Unfortunately, Cameron is not tackling those issues but rather presses for a free-trade agenda that liberalises everything except for the movement of people. That is a strategic mistake. Not just because we Greens would be upset at the UK leaving the EU, but because in order to win the referendum, Cameron needs to make sure the leftist parts of society are not alienated by his plans, which seem to be to make the EU a worse place. Cameron is not wasting a single thought on leftwing voters – but they may be decisive in the referendum.

## **Claude Turmes (Luxembourg), Greens/European Free Alliance**

By starting membership negotiations with the EU, David Cameron has opened a Pandora's box that he cannot close anymore without losing face. But what are his goals exactly and which of his demands are realistic? The United Kingdom already has opt-outs on the monetary union and the Schengen border-free travel regime. On justice and home affairs legislation, it is entitled to a flexible "opt in" to specific initiatives. On important subjects such as taxation and foreign policy, the EU applies a unanimity rule, giving the British the possibility to veto any legislation.

There are two issues that remain a thorn in British eurosceptics' eyes. First, there is the principle of free movement of workers and their right to claim social benefits. This is a fundamental part of the European community and is non-negotiable. Then there is the UK's 'better regulation' agenda, using populist parables to portray the EU as a bureaucratic monster that would rather regulate washers and bananas instead of focussing on important issues. The Juncker Commission clearly supports this agenda and is continuously trying to impose significant obstacles for new regulation and legislation. This stance clearly follows a deregulatory agenda, attacking regulation as such. It reveals a one-sided view on legislation, which only looks at the burden for business, failing to recognize the protection brought upon by these laws. During the past years and decades, the EU has – despite opposition from the British elites in Brussels – achieved ground-breaking improvements for the protection of the environment, occupational health and safety, and consumer and health protection.

Does Cameron want a deal that only favours big business at the cost of the environment, health, social standards and welfare, or does he want a deal for the UK's citizens? If the latter is the case, deregulation is definitely not the right solution. Instead, we need strong and binding standards on matters that affect us in our everyday lives.

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