

It is clear that the call for competitiveness of the EU as well as for a fair treatment of the UK as a member of the Single Market must be heard. Apart from that, the right of the national parliaments to use the “orange card” can be strengthened in a practical way, applying the rules of the treaty.

I dare to predict that after long negotiations the British government will eventually realise that substantial treaty changes are impossible. Unless David Cameron manages to sell adjustments of the EU-UK relationship (which I believe are feasible) as his victory to the British public and – maybe even more importantly – to his own party, then there will be only one decision left: Brexit or no Brexit?

This shall be up to the British people to decide. After all, Britain needs the EU more than the EU needs Britain, and in many respects.

Richard Corbett MEP, PES (Labour), UK, Member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

The role of the European Parliament in the UK’s renegotiation saga could be crucial or minor – depending on how the talks go – and in the ultimate case of an eventual Brexit, decisive as regards the terms and conditions for subsequent arrangements.

For the “reforms” Cameron is seeking, much depends on the instruments used to secure them. If changes to existing EU legislation are required, then these must get through the (possibly reluctant) Parliament. If a treaty protocol is the instrument of choice, then there is no formal European Parliament veto (though in certain circumstances, it could insist on a Convention to examine the changes and probably propose others), but the approval of 28 national parliaments will ultimately be needed. If the reforms consist of jointly agreed interpretations of the treaty (whether or not these are lodged with the UN) or changes to Council’s Rules of Procedure, or undertakings entered into by the Commission or by Member States, then there is no formal role for the Parliament, but it will certainly be a major forum of political debate on them, contributing to the shaping of opinion in political parties across Europe.

Finally, if there is a Brexit, the European Parliament has a veto over any terms negotiated for future arrangements.

György Schöpflin MEP, EPP (Fidesz), Hungary, Member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

The first point to make is that Parliament is, understandably, divided over Brexit. The three main parties – EPP, S&D, ALDE – are in favour of the UK remaining in the EU, but the parties to the right of the EPP are Eurosceptic.

For myself, I can speak with authority only about the EPP, which is in favour of UK membership. On the other hand, the UK remaining – it has been called “Bremain” – cannot come at any price. The EPP strongly supports the inviolability of the four freedoms and that they are causally linked. If one is restricted – the freedom of movement of labour – it cannot be ruled that there will be calls for restrictions on the capital markets, above all from the Central European states, which have seen a massive outflow of population and an inflow of capital that at times has been less than sensitive towards local concerns.

A further aspect of a potential Brexit is the possibility of the break-up of the UK. If Scotland votes to remain, but there is an English majority for departure, Scotland would opt for independence. This would be a major headache for the EU, as there is no precedent for a development of this kind and would give rise to far-reaching constitutional issues. Equally, this would encourage Catalan and maybe Basque moves towards leaving Spain, an outcome that Madrid finds unthinkable.

Finally, there is the vexed question of treaty change. It is widely, if uneasily, acknowledged that the Lisbon Treaty cannot be the last such EU agreement, but calling a Convention, agreeing on a text and then having it ratified by 28 member states, as well as the European Parliament, would be painful and tortuous. As against that, the departure of the UK from the EU would necessarily mean amending the treaties. It looks like an insoluble dilemma, at this time anyway.

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