

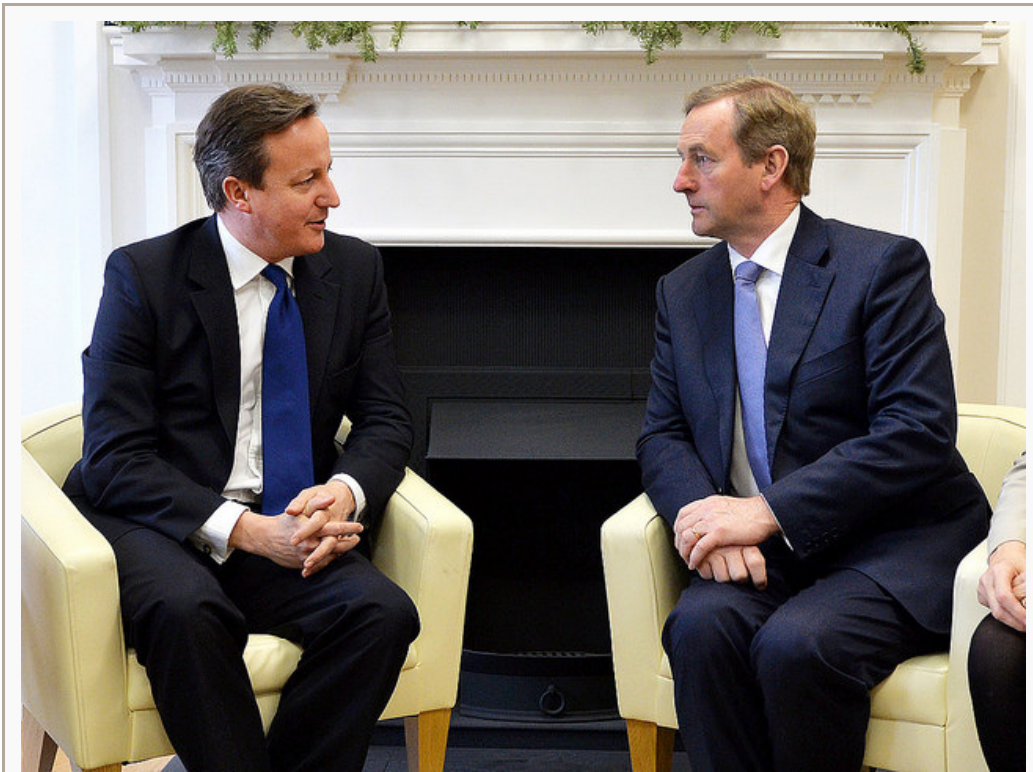
Jean-Claude Juncker is wrong and dangerously out of touch to demand an immediate Brexit

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*The EU referendum has turned UK politics on its head, with one and possibly two party leaders being sacrificed, a new Prime Minister in the pipeline, Scotland's leader seeking a second independence referendum, and even the question of Irish reunification back on the agenda. The President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker has suggested that the UK should 'Brexit' as soon as possible, in order to avoid further uncertainty. Here, **Sean Swan** argues that this position is dangerously wrong.*



Cameron and a former European colleague (Credit: [Northern Ireland Office](#), CC BY 2.0)

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, wants the UK out of the EU immediately. His reasoning is, doubtlessly, to take a hardline with the UK *pour encourager les autres*. Let other EU member states contemplating an exit take heed and tremble as the UK is given a punishment beating! This may be the diktat of a high handed elitist or the pouting of a frustrated child, but what it most definitely is not is the stance of a statesman. The referendum result happened for a reason, a majority of the people are unhappy with UK membership of the EU as it currently exists. Juncker is going for the doomsday 'out' option on this rather than seek to understand why people are discontented and seeking to address their concerns. This referendum result can – and should be – seen as a demand for reform. If Juncker assumes the stance of some latter day Nicolae Ceaușescu, he may well intimidate some into compliance in the short term, but he will also further stoke Euroscepticism. This is a stupid, short-sighted and doomed policy.

Let nobody be deluded about what is happening here. We may be witnessing a sort of western 1989. The collapse of both the EU and the UK is now a real possibility. Perhaps it will be relatively orderly as in the case of the Eastern Bloc, but maybe it will take on aspects of the collapse of Yugoslavia. Think it could never happen here? A

referendum on Irish unity could spark off conflict in Northern Ireland, even Scottish independence is a bitterly divisive issue. Think on. Think Spain, think Belgium. Unthinkable? Yes, but everything is unthinkable – right up to the moment it becomes inevitable. Even as things stand, the political divisions not just between England and other parts of the UK but within England itself are dangerous and inflamed.

At the moment there is a British government which is pro-EU. Negotiation is possible. Even a second referendum on reformed membership is possible. Halting the exit process to allow time for reflection and negotiation is still possible – in fact, it's necessary. It would take the heat and immediacy out of calls for Scottish independence, a united Ireland and London independence. This does not constitute ignoring the referendum result, it means taking it very seriously. Nobody doubts that the heart of the Out vote was a working-class revolt. It has as much to do with the failed economic policies of austerity and neoliberalism and its resultant hardships and insecurities as with the mechanisms of the EU itself. The fact that this mood was ignored by the left – who should have led it in some productive reforming direction – only to be finally captured by UKIP and the Tory right is but one of the bitter ironies of this situation. Those gunning for Corbyn now may be right, but Corbyn's failure was not, as some unreconstructed Blairites insinuate, that he was too left-wing. If anything, he was not left wing enough. Corbyn's response to the referendum should have been a cry of 'a pox on both your houses!', this is an internal Tory feud, this referendum is unnecessary. What is necessary are economic reforms both in the UK and in the EU – so vote Remain but remember that you should not even have to answer this question because it should not have been asked. The real questions are jobs, wages, hospitals and housing – and an end to austerity.

Brexit, particularly a Brexit based on the extremist economic policies of the free market fundamentalists of Economists for Brexit, offers nothing to the English working-class except the destruction of British industry and a move to a 100% service based economy. How does a future frying burgers in McDonalds sound? And that would be the privileged position of those lucky enough to find a job. There must be reforms, including economic reforms, and those reforms require a reformed UK within a reformed EU. The alternative is as stark as it is simple – no EU and no UK.

Juncker must change his tone and his posture, and if he refuses to do so, it falls to the leaders of other member states and to the EU Parliament to help him see the error of his ways. In the final analysis it may fall to the people of Europe themselves to make their voices heard on this issue. This is not funny anymore.

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