

# Daniel Mulhall, Irish Ambassador: Why I hope the UK will remain in the European Union

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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. **Daniel Mulhall**, Ireland's Ambassador, writes on why he hopes Britain will remain in the European Union.*



Why is it that Ireland has a firm view about the upcoming UK referendum on EU membership? It is because this is a major watershed moment for the UK and for the European Union of which Ireland is, and will continue to be, a committed member.

In Ireland, we do not have a say in the coming referendum (except that British people in Ireland and Irish people in Britain do have a vote on 23 June), but we do have a view and, as friendly neighbours, it is incumbent on us to let our position be known. We would not be good neighbours if we failed to express the very real concerns we have about the risks and potential consequences for Ireland and Europe of a British exit from the EU.

As someone with a deep interest in European history, I can see that the past 70 years have been one of the most peaceful periods Europeans have ever experienced. Today's Europe is also a notably prosperous part of the world and the EU can, I believe, claim at least some of the credit for this. Furthermore, there are no guarantees about our future and, in my view, it makes far more sense for Europeans to band together in pursuit of shared interests instead of going their separate ways with all of the risks a British exit will entail.

In my long experience of EU affairs, I do not recognise the European Union as a nascent super state. The fact is that the EU can only deepen its integration with the unanimous approval of its 28 Member States including Ireland and the UK. Under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, any further enlargement of the EU will also require every member of the current Union to agree. This means that all 28 have a veto over the entry of any new members.

The charge often levelled against the EU that it is bureaucratically driven does not square with my own experience. All key EU decisions are taken by politicians with electoral mandates – Government Ministers meeting in the Council of Ministers and democratically-elected members of the European Parliament. National parliaments also have a role to play in overseeing EU legislation. Furthermore, some of the key issues of public policy – health, education, social welfare, personal taxation, justice and defence – are dealt with solely or almost exclusively at the national level.

As far as sovereignty is concerned, our view is that effective sovereignty is enhanced by being pooled at the EU level. We have always been comfortable with the concept of pooled sovereignty, which, it seems to me, is more valid than ever in a world where so many issues are clearly best dealt with by means of concerted action.

EU membership has been very good for Ireland, enabling us to strengthen and diversify our economy and attract high quality inward investment. It has also been good for our relations with the UK, which have never been stronger than they are today. We have learned to understand each other better and to value the many things we have in common. We would miss the UK around the EU table if it were to decide to leave.

Membership has also had a positive impact on North-South ties in Ireland, having brought about the open border that exists today to the benefit of both parts of Ireland. The EU has also been supportive of the Northern Ireland peace process, providing valuable funding and encouragement.

The evidence is mounting – from the IMF, the OECD, the UK Treasury, the Bank of England and others – to the effect that a UK exit would damage the UK, EU and international economies. Ireland cannot expect to be untouched by this kind of development as our economic ties with the UK are vitally important to us. Trade and investment flows between us, which are facilitated by EU membership, benefit both our economies very substantially.

Two-way trade between Ireland and the UK reached €65 billion in 2015 and its volume is growing steadily. Our Economic and Social Research Institute has warned that our trade with the UK could be reduced by 20% or more as a result of the impact of a UK exit. Any significant curtailment of our trading links would hurt both countries and threaten jobs and prosperity on both sides of the Irish Sea.

My conclusion is that a UK exit from the EU carries many risks – for Ireland, for our relations with the UK, for North-South ties in Ireland and for Europe. The current open border between North and South in Ireland could not be guaranteed to continue unchanged in a post-Brexit scenario. In the event of the UK leaving, we would also miss the productive partnership we have developed within the EU, where our two countries have discovered that we have very similar approaches to many of the issues on the EU policy agenda. It would, therefore, be a great pity if Ireland and the UK were to find ourselves pushed apart as a consequence of a UK exit from the EU.

As a country that has committed its future to membership of the European Union, we hope that our nearest neighbours will continue to accompany us on that journey of partnership within the EU that has served us both so well this past 43 years and that has helped promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author

### Daniel Mulhall

Daniel Mulhall is Ireland's Ambassador in London. He is available on Twitter [@DanMulhall](https://twitter.com/DanMulhall)

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