



# Brand Europe and the British

A few years ago I sat drinking a beer with a French oyster fisherman who lives near Bordeaux. 'I hate the British,' he said. 'Everyone uses metres and kilometres. You use yards and miles. Everyone drives on the right, but you have to drive on the left.' I made apologetic noises as he took me through a long list of differences that annoyed him. But it turned out that the British were merely ridiculous. His strongest feelings were reserved for Parisians. 'Worse than any foreigner,' he assured me.

The French regions dislike Paris because they hate centralised power.

Inspiring. Authentic. Unforgettable. It's hard to disagree, but many things are inspiring, authentic and unforgettable: waterfalls, paintings by Rembrandt, my mother, to name just three.

The EU has helpfully provided a mission statement and objectives. These are thorough but long, as you would expect from a committee. Meanwhile the European President, Jean-Claude Juncker, talks passionately about Europe as a family that must stand together.

Europe is not a single idea. It is fluid, not fixed: fluid because member countries and their citizens

know is that confidence in the economy makes the British pro-Europe.

## Europe = parent

On 23rd February Greece confirmed its parent-child relationship with the EU when it handed in its homework (or reform plan) one day late. Before Greece defaulted in June, an exasperated Christine Lagarde said that negotiations with Greece would benefit from the presence of 'some adults in the room.' The far left and far right love what the Greeks are doing. But more Brits blame the crisis on the Greeks (41%) rather than the 'Troika' (11%), according to a YouGov poll taken just



**JAMIE PRIESTLEY,**  
correspondent  
London.

TELEPHONE





So it's unsurprising that only 51% of the French embraced Europe in the 1992 vote about the Maastricht Treaty. In every European Union (EU) country there are, of course, many examples of wholehearted enthusiasm about Europe, but its appeal has always been complicated, because each member must balance collective and national interests.

In one sense, the fascinating and terrifying spectacle of the current European crisis is well timed. It is now 40 years since a UK vote about its relationship with Europe. With an 'in/out' referendum promised in the next two years, the British are closely watching Grexit-or-not. We hope the crisis will reveal some truth about Europe which is normally hidden behind the press releases.

Understanding the essence of Brand Europe is an attractive idea but we struggle to define it. The European Travel Commission has had a go, suggesting that Europe is

focus on different aspects of Europe to help them develop their own brand. How the British see Europe is illuminating not just about Europe, but also themselves. Here are some examples...

**Europe = economic powerhouse**  
There is a sceptical wing that believes the UK, if independent from Europe, would be free to negotiate better trade deals outside, and would lose none of the business it currently enjoys with other EU countries. Mean-

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while, the UK is part of an economic bloc worth 23% of global GDP if it stays. Its personal share of global GDP is 2.75%. The economic argument will rumble on. What we do

before the Greek referendum. Though the British thank their lucky stars they're not Greek, they are nervous that the EU will prefer to treat David Cameron like a petulant child when he makes his proposals for EU reform. (Mr Juncker has already advised Mr Cameron that gentle talk can achieve a lot. The Greek government has certainly shown that European ministers do not like aggression).

**Europe = bureaucrat**  
The EU's labyrinthine bureaucracy drives many British observers mad. The rule-makers of Brussels can seem much more interested in process than results that voters want. The writer Gerry Hanson recently compared the word count of three important documents. He pointed out that, 'while the Lord's Prayer contains sixty-nine words, and the Declaration of Independence two hundred and ninety-seven, an EU directive on duck eggs contains twenty-eight thousand nine hundred and eleven words.'

### Europe = Germany

The 'Oxi' vote on 5 July fits neatly into an anti-German narrative: the Greek 'Oxi' of 1940 was about defiance against fascism. Meanwhile, Britain's relationship with Germany is becoming more impartial. We have at last stopped talking about the final of the 1966 World Cup, and Mrs Merkel is more consistently admired here than she is at home in Germany, in part because she's likely to play a big role facilitating Mr Cameron's negotiations with the EU.

Like any entity, the UK is full of contradictions. The British like their yards and miles and the other differences they carefully preserve. They also love being connected to Europe, and not only because it's the world's largest economic unit. Being both British and European is tiring, but it does make life much more interesting. It will be a resounding Yes on referendum day.

by **Jamie Priestley**

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