THE PATH TO REJOINING

Five principles to win a sustainable, democratic majority for EU membership

ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE

Back full EU membership for the UK

Time to ditch the ‘red lines’ and put the UK fully back on the path to integration with Europe.

That means starting with the single market and customs union and then going from there. As the Starmer government struggled to negotiate special deals with the EU that radical enough to really make a difference to Britain’s struggling economy, growing pressure to ‘go big’ on Europe is inevitable. That means starting with as rapid as possible shift back to the single market, as part of a strategy to rejoin the EU in the lifetime of the next UK Parliament. As a long-term solution, single market membership actually has less support than full rejoin. But it can be a stepping stone on the path to restoring full membership of the European club.

Make Rejoin sustainable by pursuing democratic and constitutional change

Britain’s long Brexit crisis is a feature of a winner-takes-all electoral system and a hyper-centralised multinational state. Today this broken political system is creaking under the pressure of multi-party politics and different national political dynamics that it simply can’t handle.

To make rejoin stable and sustainable over the long term we have to embed it in democratic and constitutional change. In no election in the twenty-first century have pro-Brexit parties won a majority of the popular vote across the UK, nor have they ever won in the devolved assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which all back rejoining the EU. While no electoral system can totally insulate the UK’s relationship with the EU from political turbulence in these fraught times, we need to establish a constitutional basis to stabilise UK membership.

To ensure that our political system reflects the democratic majority across all its nations, a proportional electoral system in Westminster is critical together with reform of the House of Lords to make it a democratic check on the House of Commons.

Be honest about the Europe we are joining

We know that Europe is far from perfect. The same politics of division that led to Brexit can be found across Europe and the wider world too. Millions have suffered as a result of the EU’s migration policies - sometimes paying the ultimate price. The EU lost a decade of economic growth to disastrous austerity policies, embedded in the Stability and Growth Pact.

But we can't solve any of these many problems, or fight for something better, if we are not part of the conversation. In fact, there are a range of big debates across Europe on what the future of the union will look like, from how to incorporate new members, to different levels of integration. We should join this debate in good faith with a seat at the table, with an internationalist mindset, asking what is best for the building of a progressive Europe.

Rejoining the EU requires overcoming British exceptionalism

There is no going back to British exceptionalism and to the idea that the UK alone deserves special opt-outs and rebates. But like all aspiring member-states, the UK's bid to rejoin will involve a negotiation.

Former EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier has proposed that it would be 'perfectly possible' for the UK to rejoin seeking opt-outs from the Eurozone and Schengen. We advocate for entering negotiations to rejoin in good faith and with an open mindset about the issue of currency and borders - on which there are important debates among progressives here in the UK that will need to be aired. The UK also currently shares the Common Travel Area with the Republic of Ireland, and any discussion on border policy while rejoining the EU should be conducted in close collaboration with the Irish government, as well as in dialogue with the devolved administrations and mayoralties within the UK.

A Europe for the security and well-being of all

We live in an increasingly dangerous world. The era of low defence budgets and reliance on the US security umbrella is likely over. Europe, for all its faults, increasingly stands alone as a bloc of relative openness to the values of democracy and social solidarity - despite its own problems with rising far-right nationalism. Caught between far-right forces in both Trump's US and a Russia thirsty for conquest, the UK and EU share the same core security concerns.

This means a UK bid to rejoin the EU would be significantly in the interests of both sides. In principle, the UK could provide significant defence capacity to contribute to a new joint security framework less dependent on the US - even if its construct is very dependent on Washington.

But none of this means that we must forgo our values. Quite the opposite. Many security experts argue that effective defence involves whole-of-society views of security, more democracy, more social justice and cohesion, and a sense that the rights we enjoy are worth defending.

An unequal, unjust society is also an insecure society that will be increasingly vulnerable to outside malevolent interference and divide-and-rule tactics.