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PRESS WATCH - The EU has lost its way - we should leave now and join our economic forces with Britain

The 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome coincided with the UK invoking Article 50 of that same Treaty to exit Europe, Ray Kinsella writes in the Irish Independent

In fact, what will unfold over the next three to five years is less about the UK exiting Europe than it is about leaving what Europe has now become. This speaks powerfully to Ireland's own experience of the 'new' Europe during the financial crisis and to our now marginal status.

Behind the proclamations of "solidarity" by the dominant European elite in recent weeks is the reality of a supranational entity that is fragmented three ways: the prosperous and powerful 'core', configured around Germany; the indebted and vulnerable peripheral economies

regarded at times with contempt by the centre; and, thirdly, the eastern bloc that is fixated on phantom-fears, fostered by ludicrous Nato propaganda, of imminent Russian 'aggression'.

It is a Europe scarred by deep economic inequalities, subverted by a eurozone that is radically imbalanced, and which is conflicted about its future.

The recent 'Five Options Report' by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker setting out possible future modalities for the EU is wholly at odds with the unambiguous drive toward political union set out in the 2015 'Five Presidents' Report'. Europe is all over the place.

Cultural relativism has emasculated its foundational values. There is no common set of beliefs to hold it together in the face of multiple pressures, many of them of its own making.

To understand the full extent of the emasculation of Europe's aspirations and values one needs to look no further than the threats to "make the UK pay" for its temerity in rejecting all of this - and to ensure that no other member country even considers such an option.

This is the kind of repressive political culture that is not sustainable.

The only initiative launched by Europe in the wake of Brexit has been the push, by Mr Juncker, to set up a European army - unmindful of the irony that 'militarism' is what the Europe of 60 years ago was set up to reject, and which is one of the root causes of the present EU migration crisis, and all of its tragic consequences.

The UK invoked Article 50 yesterday and it is right to exit. The pity of it is that, with a few notable exceptions, there has been little substantive debate on the options available to Ireland.

The UK is our nearest neighbour and largest trading partner with whom we share a land border and alongside whom we joined the EEC. Notwithstanding this, our political establishment remains in thrall to mediocre European leaders, failed and divisive policies over which we have no influence, and an EU north-south divide that is a scandal.

In 2013, I argued that the case for an 'IR-Exit' was robust - that it was in our best interest to engage in a managed exit from a Europe to whom we paid our dues, and one which impelled us to assume a burden of European bank debt that remains iniquitous.

In the wake of the UK's referendum, the case for exiting - and in parallel to the UK - is compelling.

Instead, our focus is on deferring to a self-serving Euro elite and rolling out red carpets to attract the 'Masters of the Financial Universe' exiting London, the same who triggered the global banking crisis and own no loyalty, other than to the 'best deal in town'. Political vision - and relationships - should run deeper than that.

Exiting alongside the UK would vindicate the aspirations of what the independence which we celebrated last year was supposed to be all about - an "august destiny...among the nations".

Exit would also open up the option of creating with the UK a confederation of autonomous nations - Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England - bound by free trade, the development of our own natural resources and highly attractive to global FDI; a confederation which would provide a democratic counter-weight to what Europe has become.

It is viable - and an alternative to our submergence in, and subservience to, a Europe that has truly lost its way and finds common cause only in inventing enemies and in repressing the democratic aspirations of voters in member countries.

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