



*"I don't think I've ever wanted magic more."*

JK Rowling, on Twitter, the day after the Brexit vote

In the most startling display of national sleepwalking I have ever seen, Britons voted in June to leave the European Union. The reasons are unclear, but seem to centre around a vague collective desire to "take back control".

The implications of this decision are significant and wide ranging. The main issue will be Britain's future relationship with Europe, including access to the single European market (which currently accounts for around half of Britain's trade) and the movement of people between UK and Europe. The Brexit camp is now suggesting that little will change. Britain will continue to have free access to the EU market and Britons will continue to be free to live and work in the EU. However European leaders are unlikely to negotiate such an accommodating settlement. They will want to send a clear message to other countries entertaining Euroscepticism that there is a price to be paid for leaving the union.

Both Scottish independence and Irish reunification are already back on the table. The financial centre of Europe is likely to shift from London to either Frankfurt, Paris or Dublin. The political balance between Europe and Russia has been tilted in Russia's favour. The frictional costs of doing just about anything in the UK will go up.

Whilst all of this is quite unsettling – and would be doubly so if you lived in the UK – in the end it may not come to pass. In Britain, Parliament is sovereign and a referendum has no constitutional force. There is likely to be a general election within the next year and if a pro-remain Parliament is decisively elected it would serve as a strong mandate for Britain to remain in the EU.

If there is a lesson in all of this it is perhaps for the United States. If you think you can vote for a shallow, ill-considered populist cause without suffering the consequences, think again.

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