

A Change of Perspective

by Lena M. Kruse

On 23 June, 2016, the British people with a small majority voted for the Brexit at the EU referendum. Five years later, it is now official: The Brexit is settled and Britain no longer a member of the EU. At the moment, there is a lot of coverage in the German media about the negative consequences of the Brexit. In my opinion, there is a bit too much finger pointing from Germany about Great Britain's decision. Mistake or not, for a good understanding between two countries it is always important to put yourself in the shoes of the other. So let's take a look at this from more than one perspective.

One of the reasons in favour of the Brexit, was to avoid costs. Great Britain had for many years been the second biggest net contributor in the EU and as a EU member had to financially support other members in need. In addition, a goal was to regain independence in legislation and its implementation, as well as more control over its own borders, e.g. with regard to the admission of refugees. All this can be summed up as a desire for greater freedom in national decision-making, which might also reflect a part of the British mentality in its historical context.

Of course, one cannot yet fully foresee all the consequences of the Brexit for Britain. Partly also, because the corona pandemic is leading to a number of impacts at the same time. But so far, we can say, that the Brexit has some negative effects on the economy of both Great Britain and Germany. Nevertheless, the two of them are certainly strong enough to recover from such developments in the long term. Maybe, this situation could even result in unexpected advantages.

With Great Britain, the EU itself has not only lost its economically second strongest member state and second largest net contributor, but also an experienced member, e.g. with regard to trade and economic transformation.

Since German-British trade relations are currently suffering from the Brexit, for many it feels like we are moving a little further apart. The difficult entry regulations will make it more complicated for a German to live, work and/or study in Great Britain and the other way around in the future. It will also make cultural exchange more difficult in several aspects.

We ought no to regard the Brexit as a British-German divorce. Actually Britain only left the club of which Germany (by accident) still happens to be a member. So why shouldn't these two old, close friends still go to the pub together? Especially in times where institutional differences make things more difficult. That circumstance should be reason to even more cultivate the German-British friendship, instead of looking down upon a nation for its decision to leave the EU.

Maybe it is time now to look forward: Why not try to make the best out of it? We could seize this as an opportunity to explore and test new ways and chances of coherency on a bilateral basis. Even if options are limited regarding the commercial and industrial aspect due to EU regulations that Germany is bound to, there are many other fields where two nations can cooperate freely and independantly, like culture, education and science.

I personally didn't have the chance to visit Great Britain yet, but I certainly wouldn't refrain from doing so because of such a political decision. Perhaps it makes experiences even more interesting and valuable if we have to overcome some difficulties.