

Forget Brexit - the European Union's problems are only just beginning



Former Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has complained that Ireland will be paying more to the EU after Brexit (Photo: LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP via Getty Images)

The UK has left, but the EU remains. The psychodrama in this country about leaving has been so intense that few people on either side of the domestic debate have been able to give much thought as to what this means for the EU and its continuing members.

The EU itself has inevitably had a lot of its own bandwidth tied up by the question of Brexit - both in terms of how the negotiations define its relationship with one of its largest external markets, and in terms of what the departure of a member state says about the nature and direction of the Euro-federalist project.

The untangling of almost 50 years of integration is not yet over. There is a future relationship with the UK to negotiate before the year is out. But our formal departure from the organization nonetheless allows people and politicians on both sides of the Channel to take stock of what the future might hold for the EU.

You might expect integrationists to be optimistic. Fine, they never wanted to lose a member state - and a major one, at that - along the way, and Brexit marks the first time the EU has contracted rather than expanded, but it also signifies the removal of a roadblock to further integration.

The UK was always a reluctant member, requiring carve-outs, exemptions, and rebates, and muttering about awkward things like the democratic deficit and the need for referendums. Many times over the years, politicians and officials in Brussels have understandably griped about the way we have acted as a drag on their dreams of a unified EU superstate. Now that we're gone, isn't that a

problem solved?



Other countries will have to start standing up for themselves (Photo: TOLGA AKMEN/AFP via Getty Images)
