

## Leading articles



## The Europe Question

The euro crisis will force Britons to make a choice between being part of the fuller union of a federal government or a common trading bloc

Closer integration was meant to bind together the European family of nations. It has instead created discord and disharmony. It has also been an enduring source of division in British politics, within mainstream parties and across them. Writing in *The Times* today, Lord Owen, the former Foreign Secretary, proposes a way of resolving these conflicts while preserving the British people's right to democratic self-government.

The two big political questions in UK debate about Europe are, should there be a referendum on the subject and, if so, what should it be about? Lord Owen's proposal gives a compelling answer. Yes, there should be a referendum; and it should include more options than the false dichotomy of a simple yes or no to Europe.

Europe's crisis is not only about technical flaws in the adoption of a single currency. It is more fundamentally about the incompatibility of the different models that EU governments have been pursuing while claiming to be engaged in a common endeavour. Lord Owen maintains that countries that see their future as part of an ever closer union should be free to pursue that goal. But those who favour a union of self-governing states should have their sovereignty respected while being able to remain in a restructured single market.

The eurozone crisis has exposed three stresses. First, monetary union cannot work well without political union, which requires, second, a solution to Europe's democratic deficit. That leads, third, to the inevitable conclusion that this country will turn its back on Europe. Lord Owen suggests a way through, in which Britain can remain part of a renewed single market without submitting to the demand to be part of a single government.

Monetary union requires mechanisms to transfer funds from states that are flourishing to those that are struggling. It also requires a Europe-wide bank regulator and centralised bond issuance. Fiscal union therefore requires that decisions over budgets be taken away from national parliaments. Budgetary decisions not taken at the national level must be accountable to the people of Europe through democratically elected representatives rather than government appointed bureaucrats. Dealing with Europe's democratic deficit then runs into the problem of British sovereignty. If the integrationist project is about building institutions over the heads of national electorates, British governments have the obligation, as well as the right, to resist.

*The Times* has from the outset criticised the notion of a single European currency, on eco-

nomical and democratic grounds. Greater integration at the European level has led to greater alienation in the UK. The Lib-Con coalition has been left in the uncomfortable position of recognising that a collapse of the euro would be disastrous for the UK economy, while having no intention of adopting that course itself.

That apparently inconsistent position is in fact defensible. And it suggests an approach for a UK referendum. The questions that should be put to the British people, suggests Lord Owen, are these. Should the UK be part of a single market in a wider European Community? And should Britain remain in the EU, retaining the option of joining the more integrated eurozone?

No one can plausibly depict Lord Owen as hostile to European ideals and he disclaims even the term "Eurosceptic". But he recognises the fundamentally undemocratic arrogation of power that the EU represents. British consumers and businesses benefit from the efficiency gains of a single market. There is no reason that the UK ought to abandon its status as an independent, self-governing nation in order to retain them. There is a way of reconciling those aims. Though Lord Owen may not have all the answers, he has certainly posed a fundamental question.

## Telling the Truth

Attempting to conceal the facts about child sexual exploitation fails the victims

Rotherham has a longstanding problem with the sexual exploitation of young girls by older men of Pakistani heritage. This problem, the town's safeguarding children board said in a report published last week, "can only be addressed by acknowledging it". Quite so. Yet the board chose to censor much of that same report, in particular the references to child sexual exploitation and the fact that in the town such exploitation is organised and perpetrated by men of Pakistani heritage. It would seem that the Rotherham board has a strange definition of "acknowledging" a problem.

The report resulted from a serious case review into dealings that the board's constituent agencies had had with Laura Wilson, the 17-year-old murdered by Ashtiaq Asghar in 2010. Laura had been referred to a specialist child sex exploitation unit at the age of 11. She was known to be at risk of abuse by men of Pakistani origin. She was made pregnant by one such man when she was 16. Yet the board chose to limit its review to only the final two years of Laura's life and not to investigate the likelihood that she had been a victim of sexual exploitation by British Pakistanis,

exploitation that culminated in her murder.

The claim made by Alan Hazell, the board's chairman, that "at no stage did we have any evidence that Laura was involved in child sexual exploitation" does not survive a moment's scrutiny. Nor does it suggest a problem being acknowledged, but the opposite.

Two years ago Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, ordered that serious case reviews be published. Nonetheless, the Rotherham board asked Mr Gove's department for permission to keep its entire review into Laura Wilson secret. It refused. The board then published the redacted version. When the board learnt that this newspaper had discovered details of those redactions, it threatened an injunction to prevent us sharing the information with our readers. Using the courts to suppress facts concerning a problem of significant public interest is a funny way to demonstrate that you are acknowledging that problem.

In the event, under pressure from Mr Gove, Rotherham dropped its injunction threat. Not before, however, barristers had been instructed, a

waste of money on which the council taxpayers of the town might like to reflect. The citizens of Rotherham will surely also note that rather than disseminate facts pertinent to the wellbeing of the town's children, their own council has made every effort to keep those facts secret. Mr Gove wants the report to be published "as fully as possible". We look forward to Rotherham complying.

In her short life, Laura came into contact with 15 agencies that exist wholly or partly to help children like her. Given such extensive contact, Mr Hazell's claims that no one "could have saved Laura from what ultimately happened to her" is a curiously fatalistic one. What "ultimately happened to her" was a direct result of what actually was happening to her, which these agencies failed to prevent and have since tried to conceal.

Laura's murder was not inevitable. Saving her is exactly what could, should and quite probably would have happened had these numerous agencies acknowledged her plight. But they didn't acknowledge it then and they still don't now. Those charged with her care repeatedly failed Laura Wilson in life and are failing her again in death.

## On the Throne

The Olympics should copy the Diamond Jubilee in all but one way

There was a time when, strange as it may seem, Britain struggled with public spectacle. Queen Victoria's wedding to Prince Albert in 1840 was ruined by the Archbishop of Canterbury struggling to get the ring on to the bride's finger.

Not any longer. The river pageant, the concert and the carriage procession were organised with a perfect balance between spectacle and security. And only 50 days to go before we do it all again as London hosts the Olympic Games.

As the barriers are cleared from the The Mall, there is clearly a lot that the Olympics can learn

from the display. The most obvious is that it would be crazy not to write a part for the leading lady. It is gratifying that Danny Boyle, the man charged with staging the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, has already asked the Queen to join his extravaganza.

The second, rather unexpected, lesson of the Diamond Jubilee was that, if the Queen is not available, then Grace Jones is quite a stand-in.

Third, encourage fancy dress. It is a law of crowd control that nothing untoward will happen, no matter how large the assembly, if most

of those attending are wearing wigs and face paint.

Fourth, Trunk Animation Limited, whose light show turned Buckingham Palace into a row of terraced houses, is staffed by geniuses who must be employed at every public event.

But, although the British may love to queue, standing in line is less fun if the only treat in store is a visit to a portable loo. This is the main lesson to be learnt from the Diamond Jubilee. If the Olympic organisers hire a few more, they will avoid the single thing about the jubilee weekend that might have gone better, not to say quicker.

**Times Jubilee**  
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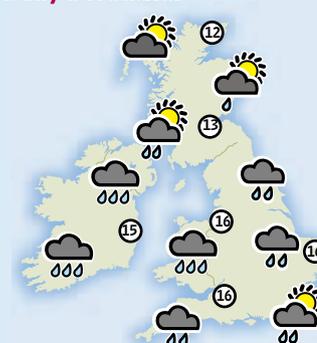


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### Today's weather



A rather cloudy day with outbreaks of rain, heaviest across Ireland and Wales. Full report, page 61