

Opinion
Brexit

The Observer view on leaving the European Union

Observer editorial

We need to stay close to the EU – for the good of the economy and the cultural ties that bind us

Sun 2 Feb 2020 06.00



A farewell message on the white cliffs from Sky News. Photograph: Tim P Whitby/SKY NEWS HANDOUT/EPA

So it is done. On Friday night, 47 years of British membership of the European Union and its forebears came to an end. It was a moment that will irrevocably shape the course of our nation's history, but in quite what direction it is impossible to tell. The paradox of Brexit lives on. Britain has taken a monumental decision from which there is no retreat in the foreseeable future. And yet, three and a half years on from the referendum that heralded our departure, nothing of substance about what it means for our future has been resolved. [Brexit](#) continues to be defined by its champions' hostility to the EU, rather than a realistic vision of what we could become.

For some, it is a new beginning; for others, a historic mistake. Some are jubilant at the prospect of a sovereign nation unbound; others grieve for the enforced separation from allies and from the values the European project represents. Where joyful pride and optimism soar, so too in equal measure do hearts sink at narrowing horizons and a shrivelled vision of greatness. Generationally and geographically, Britain remains as divided as ever on Europe. The prime minister's responsibility is to chart a course that can heal divisions and bring the UK together. That is the rhetoric that infuses his every speech. But the smoke signals point to a different approach. [Boris Johnson](#), they suggest, continues to see Brexit through the prism of the ideological project he used to catapult himself into Downing Street.

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