

Business investment hurt by Brexit

By [Magali Dauvin](#)

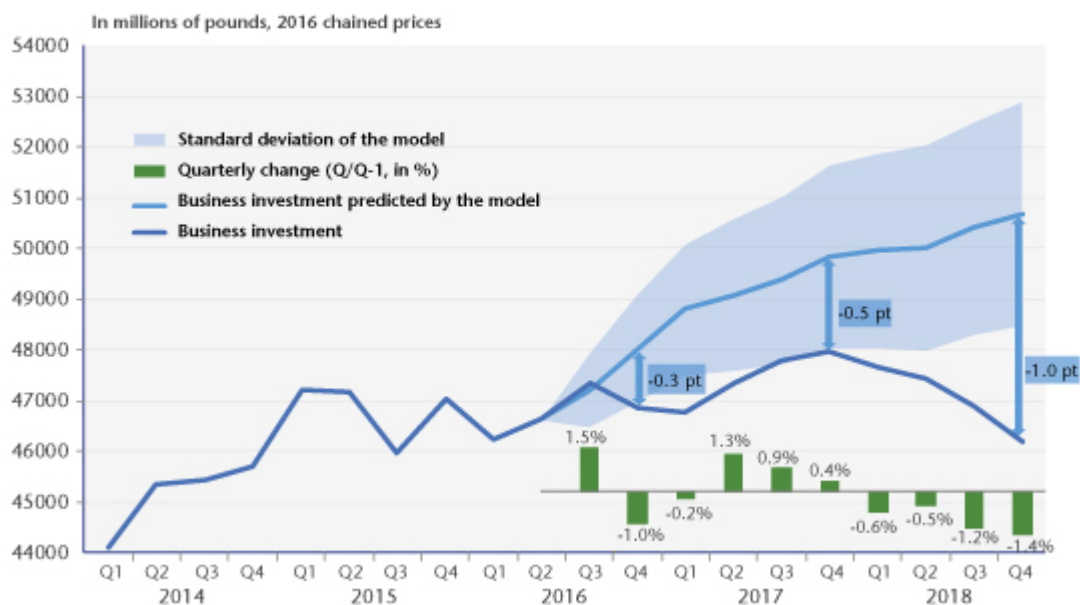
At a time when the outlook for world trade outlook remains glum [\[1\]](#), British domestic demand is struggling to remain dynamic: household consumption has run out of steam at the end of the year, while investment fell by 1.4 points in 2018.

This latest fall can be attributed almost entirely to the investment of non-financial corporations [\[2\]](#) (55% of GFCF in volume), which fell consecutively during the four quarters of the year (Figure 1), for a total fall of -3.7% in 2018.

Investment can be predicted by an error-correction model [\[3\]](#), and the one used for the investment forecasts of non-financial firms in the United Kingdom benefits from an adjustment that can be considered “correct” in terms of its explanatory power (86%) over the pre-referendum period (1987Q2 – 2016Q2). If we simulate the trajectory of investment following the 2016 referendum (in light blue), we can see that it deviates systematically from the investment data reported by the ONS (dark blue) [\[4\]](#).

This result is consistent with the results found in the recent literature, which also show that the models have consistently tended to overestimate the investment rate of UK firms since 2016 [\[5\]](#). The gap has steadily risen in 2018, from 0.5 percentage point of GDP in 2017, to almost one point of GDP in the last quarter.

Figure. Evolution and simulation of investment by non-financial corporations in the United Kingdom



Source: ONS, OFCE calculations.

What explains the gap? We interpret this deviation as the effect of the uncertainty arising from Brexit, particularly that on the future trade arrangements between the UK and the EU. Nearly half of Britain's foreign trade comes from or goes to the single market. Although the inclusion of an uncertainty indicator (Economic Policy Uncertainty – EPU, see Bloom et al., 2007) in the investment equation failed to identify it clearly, several studies on data from UK firms point in this direction. First, periods of heightened uncertainty moved in line with significantly lower investment after the 2008 crisis (Smietbanka, Bloom and Mizen, 2018). In a scenario without a referendum (no Brexit), the transition to a regime with renegotiated customs tariffs would have had the effect of:

- Reducing the number of companies entering the European market and increasing the number exiting (Crowley, Exton and Han, 2019);
- Weighing on business investment with the prospect of tariffs similar to those prevailing under WTO rules (Gornicka, 2018).

The reduction in investment “cost” 0.3 percentage points of GDP in 2018, and this cost could rise as second-round effects

are taken into account (which is not the case here). If the uncertainties do not rise, the “Brexeternity” – an expression used to characterize the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, that is to say, inextricable – could have a much more depressing effect on Britain’s future growth and its citizens’ standard of living.

[\[1\] The WTO composite indicator has stayed below \(96.3\) its long-term trend \(100\) since mid-2018.](#)

[\[2\]](#) Reported by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) as Business Investment. Non-financial corporations partially or wholly owned by the government are included in this field, but they account for less than 4% of the total. This measure of investment does not include spending on housing, land, existing buildings or the costs related to the transfer of ownership of non-produced assets.

[\[3\]](#) See the article by Ducoudré, Plane and Villemot (2015) in the *Revue de l’OFCE*, for more information on the strategy adopted.

[\[4\]](#) A slight gap can be seen from 2015, when the law on the referendum was adopted.

[\[5\]](#) In particular the work of Gornicka (2018).

Britain’s referendum of 23 June 2016: The leap into the unknown

By Catherine Mathieu

On 23 June 2016, the British people decided (by 52% to 48%) to leave the European Union. After having long criticized the functioning of the EU and the constraints that it placed on the United Kingdom, on 19 February 2016 David Cameron obtained an agreement intended to allow the UK to remain in the EU – but it was not enough to convince the voters. In an [OFCE Policy Brief](#) (No. 1 of 13 July), we analyze how the British people's concerns went beyond economic issues and that what counted was their desire to maintain (or regain) their political sovereignty.

The departure from the EU is, in the words of David Cameron, “a leap into the unknown”, and all that is possible now is to develop scenarios based on hypotheses about the outcome of the negotiations to be undertaken with the EU: from a rosy scenario in which both sides want to maintain as much as possible of the existing relations, to a dark scenario where the EU wants to set an example and the UK becomes a tax and regulatory haven.

As of early July, the UK clearly had not yet decided to formally leave the EU (by triggering Article 50), and will probably not do so before September. The resignations of the Brexit camp's leaders and continuing changes in the political situation are leaving a fog over the establishment of negotiations: the pound has lost more than 10% against the euro and 12% against the dollar, and may not stabilize until the UK's situation is clarified. It seems that we are entering into a grey scenario where the various shades are still unknown.

In the short term, depending on the hypotheses adopted, the impact of a Brexit could be slightly negative for the British economy, on the order of 0.2 point of GDP in 2016 according to the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), but this could reach several percentage points of GDP

after two years depending on the scenario, with the UK Treasury entertaining the gloomiest prospects (-3.6% to -6%).

In the long term, again depending on the hypotheses adopted, the economic impact of the UK's exit would be decidedly negative, especially according to the British Treasury, but the assumptions of a sharp decline in British trade are undoubtedly exaggerated.

Brexit: What are the lessons for Europe?

By [Catherine Mathieu](#) and [Henri Sterdyniak](#)

The British vote to leave the European Union is aggravating the political crisis in Europe and in many European countries. Leaving the EU has become a possible alternative for the peoples of Europe, which may encourage parties advocating national sovereignty. The United Kingdom's departure automatically increases the weight of the Franco-German couple, which could destabilize Europe. If Scotland leaves the UK to join the EU, independence movements in other regions (Catalonia, Corsica, etc.) could seek a similar outcome. But the fragility of Europe also stems from the failure of the strategy of "fiscal discipline / structural reforms".

The departure of the United Kingdom, a fierce advocate of economic liberalism and opponent of any increase in the European budget and in the powers of Europe's institutions, as well as of a social Europe, could change the dynamics of the debate in Europe, but some East European countries, the Netherlands and Germany have always had the same position as the UK. The departure will not, by itself, cause a shift in

European policy. On the other hand, the liberalization of services and the financial sector, which the UK has been pushing for, could be slowed. The British Commissioner, Jonathan Hill, head of financial services and capital markets, should be promptly replaced. This will raise the sensitive issue of British EU officials, who in any case can no longer occupy positions of responsibility.

This will also open up a period of economic and financial uncertainty. The reaction of the financial markets, which do not like uncertainty and are in any case volatile, should not be accorded an excessive importance. The pound sterling has of course rapidly depreciated by 10% against the euro, but it was probably overvalued, as evidenced by the British current account deficit of around 6.5% of GDP in 2015.

According to Article 50 of the European Constitution, any country that decides to leave the EU should negotiate a withdrawal agreement, which sets the exit date^[1]. Otherwise, after two years the country is automatically outside the Union. The negotiations will be delicate, and must of necessity deal with all the issues. During this period, the UK will remain in the EU. European countries will have to choose between two attitudes. An understanding attitude would be to sign a free trade agreement quickly, with the goal of maintaining trade and financial relations with the UK as a privileged partner of Europe. This would minimize the economic consequences of Brexit for both the EU and the UK. However, it seems difficult to see how the UK could simultaneously enjoy both complete freedom for its own economic organization and full access to Europe's markets. The UK should not enjoy more favourable conditions than those of the current members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA – Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and Switzerland; like them, it should undoubtedly integrate the single market legislation (in particular the free movement of persons) and contribute to the EU budget. The issue of standards, such as the European

passport for financial institutions (this is now granted to the EFTA countries, but not to Switzerland), etc., would be posed very quickly. The UK may have to choose whether to comply with European standards on which it will not have a say or to be subject to regulatory barriers. The negotiations will of course be open-ended. The UK could argue for a Europe that is more open to countries outside the EU. But how much weight will it have once it's out?

A tough attitude intended to punish London so as to set an example and deter future candidates from leaving would instead require the UK to renegotiate all trade treaties from scratch (i.e. from WTO rules) so as to encourage multinational companies to relocate their factories and headquarters to mainland Europe and close British banks' access to the European market in order to push them to repatriate euro zone banking and financial activity to Paris or Frankfurt. But it would be difficult for Europe, a supporter of the free movement of goods, services, people and business, to start erecting barriers against the UK. The euro zone has a current account surplus of 130 billion euros with the UK: does it want to call this into question? European companies that export to the UK would oppose this. Industrial cooperation agreements (Airbus, arms, energy, etc.) could only be challenged with difficulty. A priori it would seem unlikely that London would erect tariff barriers against European products, unless in retaliation. Conversely, London could play the card of setting up tax and regulatory havens, particularly in financial matters. It could not, however, avoid international constraints (agreements such as at COP21, on the fight against tax avoidance, on the international exchange of tax and banking information, etc.). The risk would be to start a costly game of mutual reprisals (one that it would be difficult for Europe, divided between countries with different interests, to lead).

Upon leaving the European Union, the United Kingdom, a net

contributor to the EU, would a priori save about 9 billion euros per year, or 0.35% of its GDP. However, the EFTA countries and Switzerland contribute to the EU budget as part of the single market. Again, everything depends on the negotiations. It would seem that the savings for the UK will be only about 4.5 billion euros, which the other Member countries will have to make up (at a cost of around 0.5 billion euros for France).

Given the uncertainty of the negotiations (and of exchange rate trends), all assessments of Brexit's impact on other EU countries can only be very tentative. Moreover, this will necessarily have only a second-order impact on the EU countries: if tariff or non-tariff barriers reduce French exports of cars to the UK and of British cars to France, French manufacturers can supply their national markets while facing less competition and can also turn to third countries. It is nevertheless useful to have an order of magnitude: in 2015, exports from France (from the EU) to the UK represented 1.45% of GDP (respectively 2.2%); exports from the UK to the EU represented 7.1% of British GDP. A priori, an equivalent impact on UK / EU trade will have 3.2 times less impact on the EU than on the UK.

According to the OECD[\[2\]](#), the fall in EU GDP will come to 0.8% by 2023 (against 2.5% for the UK), whereas remaining in the EU, participating in the deepening of the single market and signing free trade agreements with the rest of the world would lead to a rise in GDP for all EU countries. But how credible is this last assertion, given the euro zone's current poor performance and the cost for the economic and social cohesion of European countries of opening the borders? But if Europe is functioning poorly, then leaving should improve market prospects. The UK's foreign trade would suffer a contraction, which would hurt its long-term productivity, but despite its openness the British economy's productivity is already weak. The OECD does not raise the question of principle: should a

country give up its political sovereignty to benefit from the potential positive effects of trade liberalization?

According to the Bertelsmann Foundation[\[3\]](#), the reduction in EU GDP (excluding the UK) in 2030 would range from 0.10% in the case of a soft exit (the UK having a status similar to that of Norway) to 0.36% in the worst case (the UK having to renegotiate all its trade treaties); France would be little affected (-0.06% to -0.27%), but Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg more so. The study multiplied these figures by five to incorporate medium-term dynamics, with the reduction in foreign trade expected to have adverse effects on productivity.

Euler-Hermes also reported very weak figures for the EU countries: a fall of 0.4% in GDP with a free trade agreement and of 0.6% without an agreement. The impact would be greater for the Netherlands, Ireland and Belgium.

Europe needs to rebound, with or without the United Kingdom...

Europe must learn the lessons from the British crisis, which follows on the debt crisis of the southern European countries, the Greek crisis, and austerity, as well as from the migrant crisis. It will not be easy. There is a need to rethink both the content of EU policies and their institutional framework. Is the EU up to the challenge?

The imbalances between EU Member countries grew from 1999 to 2007. Since 2010, the euro zone has not been able to develop a coordinated strategy enabling it to restore a satisfactory level of employment and reduce the imbalances between Member states. The economic performance of many euro zone countries has been poor, and downright catastrophic in southern Europe. The strategy implemented in the euro zone since 1999, and strengthened since 2010 – “fiscal discipline / structural reforms” – has hardly produced satisfactory results socially or economically. On the contrary, it gives people the feeling

of being dispossessed of any democratic power. This is especially true for countries that benefited from assistance from the Troika (Greece, Portugal, Ireland) or the European Central Bank (Italy, Spain). The Juncker plan that was intended to boost investment in Europe marked a turning point in 2015, but it remains timid and poorly taken up: it was not accompanied by a review of macroeconomic and structural policy. There are important disagreements in Europe both between nations and between political and social forces. In the current situation, Europe needs a strong economic strategy, but it has not been possible to agree on one collectively in today's Europe.

There are two fundamental reasons for this morass. The first concerns all the developed countries. Globalization is creating a deeper and deeper divide between those who benefit from it and those who lose^[4]. Inequalities in income and status are widening. Stable, well-paid jobs are disappearing. The working classes are the direct victims of competition from low-wage countries (Asian countries and former Soviet bloc countries). They are being asked to accept cuts in wages, social benefits, and employment rights. In this situation, the elite and the ruling classes can be open-spirited, globalist and pro-European, while the people are protectionist and nationalist. This same phenomenon underlies the rise of France's National Front, Germany's AFD, UKIP, and in the US the Republican Donald Trump.

Europe is currently operated according to a liberal, technocratic federalism, which seeks to impose on people policies and reforms that they are refusing, sometimes for reasons that are legitimate, sometimes questionable, and sometimes contradictory. The fact is that Europe in its current state is undermining solidarity and national cohesion and preventing countries from choosing a specific strategy. The return to national sovereignty is a general temptation.

Furthermore, Europe is not a country. There are significant differences in interests, situations, institutions and ideologies between peoples, which render progress difficult. Because of the differences in national situations, many arrangements (the single monetary policy, the free movement of capital and people) pose problems. Rules that had no real economic foundation were introduced in the Stability Pact and the Budgetary Treaty: these did not come into question after the financial crisis. In many countries, the ruling classes, political leaders and senior civil servants have chosen to minimize these problems, so as not to upset European construction. Crucial issues concerning the harmonization of taxes, social welfare, wages and regulations have been deliberately forgotten. How can convergence towards a social Europe and a fiscal Europe be achieved between countries whose peoples are attached to structurally different systems? Given the difficulties of monetary Europe, who would wish for a budgetary Europe, which would take Europe further from democracy?

In the UK-EU Agreement of 19 February, the UK has recalled the principles of subsidiarity. It is understandable that countries concerned about national sovereignty are annoyed (if not more) by the EU's relentless intrusions into areas that fall under national jurisdiction, where European intervention does not bring added value. It is also understandable that these countries refuse to constantly justify their economic policies and their economic, social or legal rules to Brussels when these have no impact on the other Member states. The UK noted that the issues of justice, security and individual liberties are still subject to national competence. Europe needs to take this feeling of exasperation into account. After the British departure, it needs to decide between two strategies: to strengthen Europe at the risk of further fuelling people's sense of being powerless, or to scale down the ambition of European construction.

The departure of the United Kingdom, the de facto distancing of some Central European countries (Poland, Hungary) and the reticence of Denmark and Sweden could lead to an explicit switch to a two-tiered EU. Many national or European intellectuals and politicians think that this crisis could provide just such an opportunity. Europe would be explicitly divided into three groupings. The first would bring together the countries of the euro zone, which would all agree to new transfers of sovereignty and to build a stronger budgetary, fiscal, social and political union. A second grouping would bring together the European countries that do not wish to participate in such a union. The last grouping would include countries linked to Europe through a free trade agreement (currently Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, and later the UK and other countries).

Such a project would, however, pose many problems. Europe's institutions would have to be split between euro zone institutions operating on a federal basis (which need to be made more democratic) and EU institutions continuing to operate in the Union manner of the Member states. Many countries currently outside the euro zone are opposed to this kind of change, which they feel would marginalize them as "second-class" members. The functioning of Europe would become even more complicated if there were both a European Parliament and a euro zone Parliament, euro zone commissioners, euro zone and EU financial transfers, and so on. This is already the case for instance with the European Banking Agency and the European Central Bank. Many questions would have to be decided two or three times (once in the euro zone, again at the EU level, and again for the free trade area).

Depending on the issue, the Member country could choose its grouping, and things would quickly head towards an à la carte union. This is hardly compatible with the democratization of Europe, as soon there would be a Parliament for every question.

The members of the third grouping would then be in an even more difficult situation, with the obligation to comply with regulations over which they had no power. Should our partner countries be placed in the dilemma of either accepting heavy losses of sovereignty (in political and social matters) or being denied the benefits of free trade?

There is clearly no agreement between the peoples of Europe, even within the euro zone, on moving towards a federal Europe, with all the convergences that this would imply. In the recent period, the five Council Presidents and the Commission proposed new steps towards European federalism: creating a European Budget Committee, establishing independent Competitiveness Councils, conditioning the granting of Structural Funds on respect for budgetary discipline and the implementation of structural reforms, establishing a European Treasury and a euro zone minister of finance, moving towards a financial union, and partially unifying the unemployment insurance systems. These developments would reinforce the technocratic bodies to the detriment of democratically elected governments. It would be unpleasant if these were implemented, as is already partially the case, without the people being consulted.

Furthermore, no one knows how to proceed with convergence on tax and social matters. Upwards or downwards? Some proposals call for a political union in which decisions are taken democratically by a euro zone government and parliament. But can anyone imagine a federal authority, even a democratic one, that is able to take into account national specificities in a Europe composed of heterogeneous countries? What about decisions concerning the French pension system taken by a European Parliament? Or a finance minister for the zone imposing spending cuts on Member countries (as the Troika did in Greece)? Or automatic standards on public deficits? In our opinion, given the current disparity in Europe, economic policies must be coordinated between countries, not decided by

a central authority.

Europe needs to reflect on its future. Using the current crisis to move forward towards an “ever closer union” without more thought would be dangerous. Europe must live with a contradiction: the national sovereignties that peoples are attached to have to be respected as much as possible, while Europe must implement a strong and consistent macroeconomic and social strategy. Europe has no meaning in itself, but only in so far as it implements the project of defending a specific model of society, developing it to integrate the ecological transition, eradicating mass unemployment, and solving the imbalances within Europe in a concerted and united manner. But there is no agreement within Europe on the strategy needed to achieve these goals. Europe, which has been unable to generally lead the Member countries out of recession or to implement a coherent strategy to deal with globalization, has become unpopular. Only after a successful change of policies will it regain the support of the peoples and be able to make institutional progress.

[\[1\]](#) See in particular the report of the French Senate by Albéric de Montgolfier: *Les conséquences économiques et budgétaires d’une éventuelle sortie du Royaume-Uni de l’Union Européenne* [The economic and budgetary consequences of a future withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union], June 2016.

[\[2\]](#) OECD, 2016, *The Economic Consequences of Brexit: A Taxing Decision*, April. Note that to treat leaving the euro as a tax increase does not make economic sense and represents a communication that is unworthy of the OECD.

[\[3\]](#) *Brexit – potential economic consequences if the UK exits the EU*, Policy Brief, 2015/05.

[\[4\]](#) See, for example, Joseph E. Stiglitz, 2014, “Le prix de l’inégalité”, *Les Liens qui libèrent*, Paris.

The national living wage: a new means to boost low wages in the United Kingdom

By [Catherine Mathieu](#)

On 1 April 2016, a national living wage (NLW) took effect in the United Kingdom. This may come as a surprise to France, where the UK labour market is considered the epitome of a deregulated market. This new minimum wage, the NLW, adds 50 pence to the existing minimum hourly wage (the National Minimum Wage, NMW) for those over age 25, meaning a rise from £6.70 to £7.20, or 7.5%. This follows a 3.1% increase in the minimum wage in October 2015 for those over age 25 (from £6.50 to £6.70), for a total increase in one year of 10.8%. This sharp increase in the minimum wage does not represent a sudden change of course by the government. The Conservative election platform for the 2015 parliamentary elections already promised a raise in the minimum wage and pointed towards the introduction of a living wage. The announcement that the NLW would be established was made in July 2015, during the presentation of the budget by George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, following the Conservatives' election victory. This is simply the first step in an effort to raise low wages, as the government has a target of increasing the NLW to 60% of the median wage by April 2020 (up from 55% at present), to about 9 pounds.[\[1\]](#)

This boost for low wages is part of a broader strategy of the British government: first, the government says it wants to

“reward work”; not only has the minimum wage been increased, but eventually employees at the minimum wage level will no longer pay income tax (this was one of the Tories’ campaign promises in 2015). Furthermore, the government is taking measures to reduce taxes on business, including a symbolic cut in the corporation tax rate, which will be only 17% in 2020 (instead of only 20% currently), which will offset the increase in wages, at least for some companies (those that are most profitable). Finally, the government has set an ambitious target for reducing the public deficit, i.e. from 5% of GDP in 2015 to a balanced budget in 2020, in part by lowering public spending, particularly on social welfare. Raising the minimum wage would thus seem to be intended to offset, at least partially, a future reduction in benefits.

The UK’s process for setting the minimum wage is well codified. Every year the government revises the minimum wage on October 1st, based on the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission (LPC), an independent body composed of academics and representatives of employee trade unions and employers. The UK has had a minimum wage only since 1999. It was implemented according to the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission at levels that matched the low wages of that time, after broad consultation with the business sectors concerned. The implementation of the minimum wage failed to spark waves of protests from employers, nor did it have a significant impact on employment, according to various assessments by the LPC over the years. The minimum wage level was initially low, and included separate rates for adults and young people. The LPC is mandated to produce an annual report on low wages and to make recommendations to the government on adjusting the minimum wage so as to ensure that low wages do not have significant adverse impacts on the employment of the employees concerned. The government has now also charged the LPC with monitoring the implementation of the NLW and proposing future adjustments, which will take place every year in April.

The NLW applies only to those over age 25. The minimum wages of young people remain at the level set last October. There are currently five minimum wages: for apprentices (£3.30 per hour); for age 16-17 (£3.87 per hour); age 18-20 (£5.30); age 21-25 (£6.70); and over 25 (£7.20). These differences are substantial; the analyses by the LPC since 1998 have argued for lower wage rates for young people, so as to prevent them from being squeezed out of the labour market because of high salaries. This gap has won acceptance, unlike the situation in France, on the grounds that it promotes the growth of “odd jobs” for young people. The employment rate of British young people (15-24 years old) is very high (51.4% at end 2015, against 27% in France and 31% in the euro zone), and it is up significantly (it was 46.8% at end 2010).

In its March 2016 report, [\[2\]](#) the LPC drew some initial conclusions on the possible impacts of the NLW. In April 2016, about 1.8 million employees (out of 29 million salaried jobs) benefited from the NLW, while in 2015 one million adults over age 25 earned the minimum wage. The NLW represents an increase in the annual salary of 680 pounds (for the average working hours of the persons concerned, 1360 hours per year, 26h15 per week). The impacts will vary greatly depending on the sector. It is in the service sectors that low wages are most common (40% of jobs are paid the minimum wage in cleaning companies, 30% in the hotel-café-restaurant sector, and 34% in hairdressing). According to the LPC, this year the implementation of the NLW will impact payroll by around 0.7 billion pounds over the full year, i.e. 0.1% [\[3\]](#); raising the NLW to 60% of the median wage will cost another 2.4 billion pounds, which by April 2020 will represent 0.4% of the total annual payroll. These figures include a diffusion effect on the first 25 percentiles of wage-earners. The impact of introducing the NLW on wages paid will be close to 4% in the cleaning sector and 3% in the hotel-café-restaurant and hairdressing sectors. Assuming a similar diffusion effect, the Bank of England [\[4\]](#) also estimated that the NLW would lead to

a gradual increase in payroll of less than 0.5% in five years. About 3 million people would receive the NLW in 2020.

In July 2015, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that by 2020, the introduction of the NMW could result in the loss of 60,000 jobs, according to average assumptions of the elasticity of employment to its cost of -0.4 [5], while also forecasting that over that same period the UK economy would create 1.1 million jobs. The national living wage is coming into force after several years of growth and job creation that has reduced the unemployment rate (by the ILO definition) to its pre-crisis level (5.2%), meaning that any job losses in certain sectors should be very manageable.

Criticism of the NLW is currently coming from two camps: first, the trade unions are accusing the measure of further widening the gap between the wages of young people and adults; and second, employers, particularly in low-wage sectors, are warning of the risk of expanding the informal economy if the NMW is effectively increased to 9 pounds per hour by 2020, although the current level of the NLW is generally considered acceptable.

These adjustments in the British minimum wage have led the UK to join the ranks of the OECD countries with the highest minimum wage levels, although it remains behind France, for example (Figure 1). The new national living wage still leaves the British minimum wage lower than the French minimum wage (the SMIC, which represents 60% of the median wage). At £7.20, or 9 euros, the hourly rate of the British national living wage is currently almost 7% lower than the level of France's SMIC. After taking into account employer social contributions, the hourly cost of the NLW is also below the SMIC, because, even though France has enacted important exemptions from employer social contributions (Fillon exemption, Responsibility Pact, CICE credit, prime zero charge) on low wages, social contributions are also very low in the UK. Take the case of an adult over age 25, unmarried and childless, who

works 35 hours per week (Table). The hourly cost to the employer is 9.48 euros in the UK against 10.43 euros in France; the hourly cost to the employer falls to 9.21 euros in the UK if the employee works 26h15 per week, which represents the average working time of employees on the minimum wage in the UK. If we now consider the salary received by the employee, net of employee social contributions and income tax, the NLW is higher than France's SMIC, especially if the employee works more than 30 hours per week, which makes them eligible for the Working tax credit, which is more generous than France's *prime d'activité* credit. On the other hand, French employees are entitled to a much more generous public system of pension and unemployment benefits.

The establishment of the national living wage in the UK thus represents an effort to catch wages up in sectors where low wages and part-time and precarious work are most common. This increase, in its current form, will have only a marginal macroeconomic impact on the British economy.

Table. Minimum hourly wage in the United Kingdom and in France, April 2016
(case of an adult over age 25, single and childless)

In euros*				
	United Kingdom NLW, 26h**	United Kingdom NLW, 35h***	France 35h****	Difference UK-Fr 35h
Gross hourly wage, euros	9,0	9,0	9,67	-6,9 %
Rate of employer social charges	2,4 %	5,3 %	8,6 %	
Rate of employee social charges/CSG	2,1 %	4,6 %	22,9 %	
(Income tax) - (Working tax credit or French PA credit)*****	0 %	3,2 % – 11,7%	-7 %	
Hourly cost (employer)	9,21	9,48	10,43	-9,6%
Hourly gain (employee)	8,80	9,35	8,13	15 %

Note: * Based on an exchange rate for the pound sterling at start April 2016 of 1.25 euros. If the average exchange rate for 2015 is used, which is similar to the average exchange rate since 1999, the gross British wage would currently be 2% higher than the French rate.

** Average working time of an employee on the minimum wage, which does not give a right to the Working tax credit for an unmarried person over age 25 without a child.

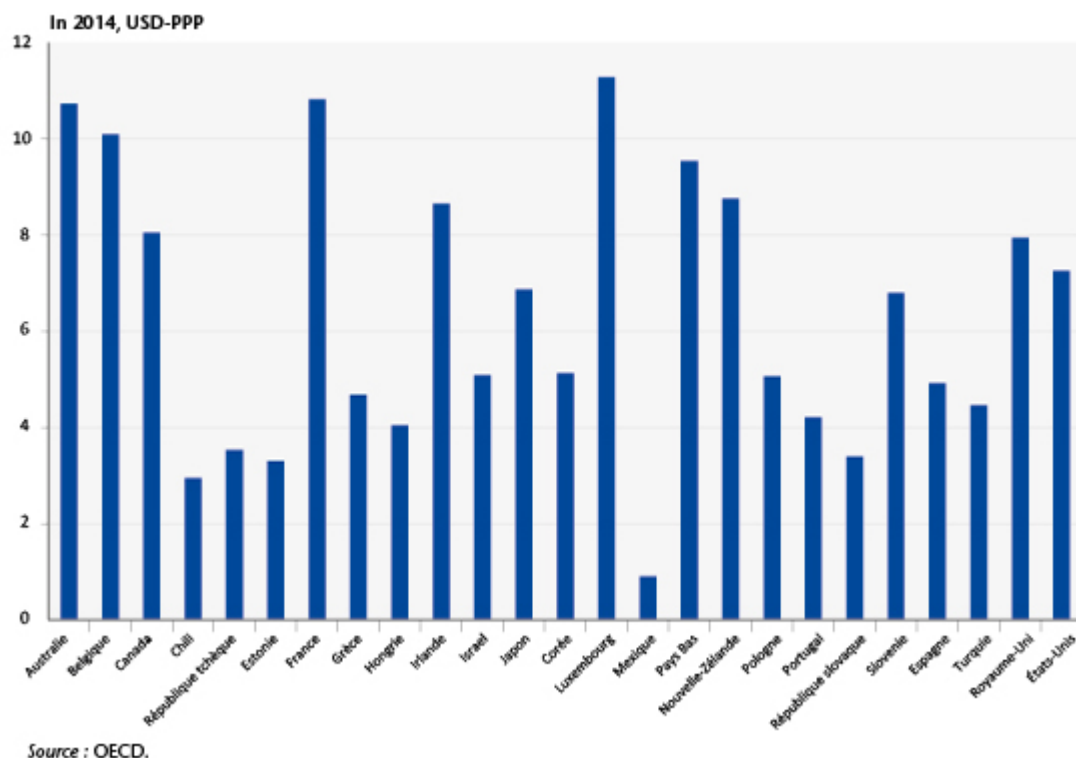
*** Based on an average working time of 35 hours per week.

**** I would like to thank Henri Sterdyniak, who provided me the apparent contribution rates for France. The employer contribution rate takes into account the Fillon exemption, the Responsibility Pact, the CICE credit and the "prime zero" charge.

***** Income tax - Working tax credit / Income tax - PA credit.

Source : Author's calculations.

Figure. Hourly minimum wage rates in the OECD countries



[1] As the aim is to reach 60% of the median wage, this figure of £9 is simply indicative, based on the projections of wage increases performed in March by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). The OBR is an independent body that has been responsible since 2010 for performing the medium-term macroeconomic forecasts used for drawing up the UK budget and for analysing the UK public finances.

[2] See [National minimum wage](#), *Low Pay Commission Report Spring 2016*, March 2016.

[3] Given the low levels of working hours and hourly wages, workers on the minimum wage earned only a quarter of the average salary at end 2015. The minimum hourly wage represented only 42.8% of the average hourly wage (£6.70 against £15.70).

[4] See Inflation report, Bank of England, August 2015.

[5] This elasticity corresponds to the median of the empirical

estimates made using British data. Job losses rise to 110,000 if we use the hypothesis of an elasticity of -0.75 but are only 20,000 for an elasticity of -0.15.

A new EU arrangement for the United Kingdom: European lessons from the February 19th agreement

By [Catherine Mathieu](#) and [Henri Sterdyniak](#)

Following the demand made by David Cameron on 10 November 2015 for a new arrangement for the United Kingdom in the European Union, the European Council came to an agreement at its meeting of 18 and 19 February. On the basis of this text, the British people will be called to the polls on 23 June to decide whether to stay in the EU. This episode raises a number of questions about the functioning of the EU.

– The United Kingdom has challenged European policy on matters that it deems crucial for itself and largely got what it wanted. Its firmness paid off. This has given rise to regrets on this side of the Channel. Why didn't France (and Italy) adopt a similar attitude in 2012, for instance, when Europe imposed the signing of the fiscal treaty and the implementation of austerity policies? This is a cause for concern: will what has been accepted for a big country be tolerated for a smaller one? The UK's threat to leave is credible because the EU has become very unpopular among the

population (especially in England), and because the UK is independent financially (it borrows easily on the capital markets) and economically (it is a net contributor to the EU budget). A country that is more dependent on Europe would have little choice. This raises worries: won't we see other countries follow suit in the future? Will Europe be able to avoid becoming a Europe à la carte (each country taking part in the activities that interest it)? But is a model based on forced participation preferable? Europe must allow a country to abstain from policies that it deems harmful.

– The United Kingdom will therefore organize a referendum, which is satisfactory from a democratic perspective. The most recent referendums have hardly yielded favourable results for European construction (France and the Netherlands in 2005, Greece in July 2015, Denmark in December 2015). The British will be limited to choosing between leaving the EU (the February agreement clearly rejects the possibility of new renegotiations if the referendum results in a majority in favour of an EU exit) or staying with a reduced status; the possibility of the UK remaining in the EU and seeking to strengthen its social dimensions, as advocated by some of the Labour Party and the Scottish Nationalists, will not be offered. Too bad.

– The United Kingdom is explicitly exempted from the need to deepen the EMU or from an “ever closer union” or “deeper integration”, all formulas contained in the treaties. The proposed arrangement clarifies that these notions are not a legal basis to extend the competences of the EU. States that are not members of the euro zone retain the right to take part or not in further integration. This clarification is, in our opinion, welcome. It would not be legitimate for the Union's powers to be extended continuously without the consent of the people. In the recent period, the five presidents and the EU Commission have proposed new steps towards European federalism: creating a European Fiscal Committee; establishing

independent Competitiveness Councils; conditioning the granting of Structural Funds on fiscal discipline; implementing structural reforms; creating a European Treasury department; moving towards a financial union; and partially unifying the unemployment insurance systems. These moves would strengthen the technocratic bodies to the detriment of democratically elected governments. Wouldn't it be necessary to explicitly request and obtain the agreement of the peoples before embarking on such a path?

– The exit of the United Kingdom, a certain distancing by some Central and Eastern Europe countries (Poland, Hungary), plus the reluctance of Denmark and Sweden could push towards an explicit move to a two-tier Union, or even, to take David Cameron's formulation, to an EU in which countries are heading to different destinations. The countries of the euro zone would for their part accept new transfers of sovereignty and would build a stronger fiscal and political union. In our opinion this proposal should be submitted to the people.

– At the same time, the draft agreement provides that the Eurogroup has no legislative power, which remains in the hands of the Council as a whole. The UK has had it clarified that a non-member state of the euro zone could ask the European Council to take up a decision on the euro zone or the banking union that it believes harms its interests. The principle of the euro zone's autonomy has thus not been proclaimed.

– The United Kingdom has had it clarified that it is not required to contribute financially to bail out the euro zone or the financial institutions of the banking union. This may be considered discomfiting vis-à-vis the European principle of solidarity, but it is understandable. This is because the establishment of the euro zone has abolished the principle: "Every sovereign country is fully backed by a central bank, a lender of last resort", which is posed by the bailout problem. The UK (and its banks) are backed by the Bank of England.

– The United Kingdom has had the principles of subsidiarity reviewed. A new provision states that parliaments representing 55% of the Member States may challenge a law that does not respect this principle. The UK has had it noted that the issues of justice, security, and liberty remain under national competence. It is a pity that countries devoted to their specific social systems and their wage bargaining systems have not done the same.

– It is understandable that countries concerned about national sovereignty are annoyed (if not more) by the EU's relentless intrusions into areas under national jurisdiction, where Europe's intervention does not bring added value. It is understandable that these countries are refusing to have to incessantly justify to Brussels their economic policies or their economic, social or legal regulations when these have no impact on other Member States. Europe must undoubtedly take these feelings of exasperation into account.

– As regards the banking union, the draft text is deliberately confusing. It is recalled that the "single rule book" managed by the European Banking Agency (EBA) applies to all banks in the EU, and that financial stability and equal competitive conditions must be guaranteed. But at the same time, it says that Member States that do not participate in the banking union retain responsibility for their banking systems and can apply special provisions. Moreover, countries that are not members of the euro zone have a right of veto on the EBA. This raises the question of the very content of the banking union. Will it make it possible to take the measures needed to reduce the scale of speculative financial activity in Europe and steer the banks towards financing the real economy? Or is the objective to liberalize the markets for the development of financial activity in Europe so as to compete with London and non-European financial centres? In the first case, what was needed was to clearly take in hand the market in London, telling it that membership in the EU requires close monitoring

of financial activities. And that its departure would allow the EU to take capital control measures to limit speculative activities and encourage banks in the euro zone to repatriate their activities.

- Likewise, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Ireland would have needed to be told that EU membership means the end of tax avoidance schemes for the multinationals.

- The United Kingdom has had a declaration passed affirming the need both to improve regulations and repeal unnecessary provisions to improve competitiveness while at the same time maintaining high standards of protection for consumers, labour, health and the environment. This compatibility undoubtedly amounts to wishful thinking.

- The text recognizes that the disparity in wage levels and social protection in European countries is hardly compatible with the principle of the free movement of persons in Europe. This has long been an unspoken part of European construction. The United Kingdom, which was one of the only countries not to take interim measures to restrict the entry of foreign workers at the time of the accession of central and eastern European countries in 2004, is now demanding that such measures be provided for in any future accessions. The draft agreement states that a European person's stay in a country other than his or her own is not the responsibility of the host country, meaning that the person either must have sufficient resources or must work.

- The question of the right to family benefits when children are not living in the same country as their parents is a tangled web. In most countries, family benefits are universal (not dependent on parental contributions). Both principles cannot be met at the same time: that all children living in a country are entitled to the same benefit; and that everyone working in a given country is entitled to the same benefits. The United Kingdom has won the right to be able to reduce

these allowances based on the standard of living and family benefits in the child's country of residence. But fortunately this right cannot be extended to pension benefits.

– Most European countries currently have mechanisms to promote the employment of unskilled workers. Thanks to exemptions on social contribution, to tax credits and to specific benefits (like in-work credits or housing benefits in France), the income that they receive is largely disconnected from their wage costs. The British example shows that these programmes can become problematic in case of the free movement of workers. How does a country encourage its own citizens to work without attracting too many foreign workers? Here is another of the unspoken issues of open borders. It is paradoxical that it is the United Kingdom that is raising the question, while it is near full employment and is claiming that the flexibility of its labour market allows it to easily take in foreign workers. In any case, the UK was granted that a country facing an exceptional influx of workers from other EU Member States can obtain the right from the Council, for seven years, to grant non-contributory aid to new workers from other member countries in a graduated process over a period of up to four years from the start of their employment. The UK has also had it clarified that it can use this right immediately. This is a challenge to European citizenship, but this concept had already been chipped away for the inactive and unemployed.

The European Union, as currently constructed, poses many problems. The Member States have divergent interests and views. Because of differences in their national situations (the single monetary policy, freedom of movement of capital and people), many arrangements are problematic. Rules without an economic foundation have been introduced into fiscal policy. In many countries, the ruling classes, the political leaders, and the top officials have chosen to minimize these problems so as not to upset European construction. Crucial issues concerning the harmonization of taxes, social

conditions, wages and regulations have been deliberately forgotten.

The UK has always chosen to keep its distance from European integration, safeguarding its sovereignty. Today it is putting its finger on sensitive points. To rejoice at its departure would be irrelevant. To use this to move mindlessly towards an “ever closer union” would be dangerous. Europe should seize this crisis to acknowledge that it has to live with a contradiction: national sovereignty must be respected as much as possible; Europe has no meaning in and of itself, but only if it implements a project that supports a specific model of society, adapting it to integrate the ecological transition, to eradicate poverty and mass unemployment, and to solve European imbalances in a concerted and united manner. If the agreement negotiated by the British could contribute to this, it would be a good thing – but will Europe’s countries have the courage to do so?

Investment behaviour during the crisis: a comparative analysis of the main advanced economies

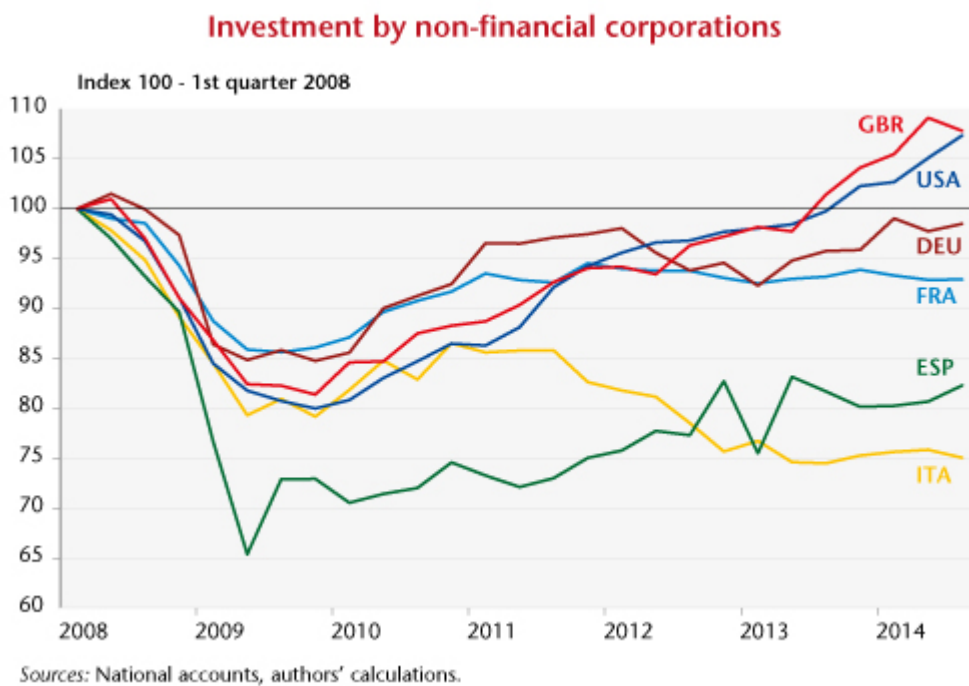
By [Bruno Ducoudré](#), [Mathieu Plane](#) and [Sébastien Villemot](#)

This text draws on the special study, [Équations d'investissement : une comparaison internationale dans la crise](#) [Investment equations : an international comparison during the crisis], which accompanies the 2015-2016 Forecast for the euro zone and the rest of the world.

The collapse in growth following the subprime crisis in late 2008 resulted in a decline in corporate investment, the largest since World War II in the advanced economies. The stimulus packages and accommodative monetary policies implemented in 2009-2010 nevertheless managed to halt the collapse in demand, and corporate investment rebounded significantly in every country up to the end of 2011. But since 2011 investment has followed varied trajectories in the different countries, as can be seen in the differences between, on the one hand, the United States and the United Kingdom, and on the other the euro zone countries, Italy and Spain in particular. At end 2014, business investment was still 27% below its pre-crisis peak in Italy, 23% down in Spain, 7% in France and 3% in Germany. In the US and the UK, business investment was 7% and 5% higher than the pre-crisis peaks (Figure).

Our study estimates investment equations for six major countries (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the UK and USA) in an effort to explain trends in investment over the long term, while paying particular attention to the crisis. The results show that using the traditional determinants of corporate investment – the cost of capital, the rate of profit, the rate of utilization of production capacity and business expectations – it is possible to capture the main developments in investment for each country in recent decades, including since 2008.

Thus, since the onset of the crisis, differences in decisions on taxation and on how tight to make fiscal policy and how expansive to make monetary policy have led to differences between countries in terms of the dynamics of the economy and real capital costs and profit rates, which account for the current disparities in corporate investment.



The United Kingdom on the eve of elections: The economy, David Cameron's trump card (1/2)

By [Catherine Mathieu](#)

In the countdown to the general elections on 7 May 2015, there is so much suspense that the bookmakers are putting the Conservative Party as winners and Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, as the next Prime Minister! Not only are the Labour Party and the Conservative Party running neck-and-neck in the polls, but with voting intentions fluctuating between 30 and 35% for many months now, neither party seems poised to secure a sufficient majority to govern alone. David Cameron, current PM and leader of the Tories, has placed the British economy at

the heart of the election campaign. And the figures do seem rather flattering for the outgoing government with regard to growth, employment, unemployment, public deficit reduction, etc., though there are some less visible weaknesses in the UK economy.

A flattering macroeconomic result

With growth of 2.8% in 2014, the UK topped the charts for growth among the G7 countries (just ahead of Canada at 2.5% and the United States at 2.4%). The British economy has been on the road to recovery for two years, as growth picked up from 0.4% yoy in the fourth quarter of 2012 to 3% in the fourth quarter of 2014. This recovery stands in contrast to the situation of the large euro zone economies, where there was a weak recovery in Germany (respectively, 1.5% after 0.4%) and weak growth in France (only 0.4%, against 0.3% in 2012), with Italy still in recession (-0.5% after -2.3%).

At the end of 2014, Britain's GDP was 5% above its pre-crisis level (*i.e.* first quarter 2008), due to a strong recovery in services, which was particularly spectacular in business services (where value added (VA) was 20% above its pre-crisis level, representing 12% of VA), with a good performance in the fields of health care (VA 20% above the level of early 2008; 7% of VA) and in real estate (VA 17% above the pre-crisis level; 11% of added value).

According to the initial estimates released on April 28 by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), GDP nevertheless increased by only 0.3% in the first quarter of 2015, instead of 0.6% as in the previous quarters. While this initial estimate is likely to be revised (upwards or downwards, only half of the data on the quarter is known for this first estimate), this slowdown in growth just a few days before the elections comes at a bad time for the outgoing government...

A strong decline in the unemployment rate ...

Another highlight of the macro-economic record as the elections approach: the unemployment rate has been falling steadily since late 2011, and was only 5.6% (ILO definition) in February 2015, against 8.4% in late 2011. This rate is one of the lowest in the EU, better than in France (10.6%) and Italy (12.6%), though still behind Germany (only 4.8%). While the unemployment rate has not yet reached its pre-crisis level (5.2%), it is now close. The number of jobs has increased by 1.5 million in the UK since 2011, and David Cameron unhesitatingly boasts of the UK's success as "the jobs factory of Europe", creating more jobs on its own than the rest of Europe combined! [\[1\]](#)

Behind this strong increase in employment, however, there are many grey areas.... First, the nature of the jobs created: 1/3 of the jobs created during this recovery are individual entrepreneurs, who now represent 15% of total employment. In times of crisis, a rise in the number of the self-employed generally reflects hidden unemployment, although according to a recent study by the Bank of England[\[2\]](#) this increase is part of a trend. The issue of the growth in what are called "zero hour" contracts, which are contracts for jobs with no guaranteed number of hours, has also burst into the discussion. Until 2013, this type of contract was not subject to statistical monitoring, but according to surveys recently released by the ONS, 697,000 households were affected by this type of contract (representing 2.3% of employment) in the fourth quarter of 2014, against 586,000 (1.9% of employment) a year earlier, *i.e.* an increase of 111,000 persons, while total employment increased by 600,000 over the period: zero-hours contracts therefore concern only a relatively small portion of the jobs created.

One corollary of the job creation that has taken place since 2011 is low gains in productivity. The British economy began to create jobs from the beginning of the recovery, while productivity fell sharply during the crisis. Companies have

kept more employees on the payroll than they usually do in times of crisis, but in return wage increases have been curtailed. UK productivity today remains well below its pre-crisis level. Will the British economy keep a growth model based on low productivity and low wages for a long time to come? It is too early to tell, but this is a subject lying in the background of the election campaign.

Very low inflation

Inflation, as measured by the harmonized index of consumer prices (HICP), fell in February 2015 to only 0% yoy against 1.9% at the end of 2012. This slowdown was due to lower energy prices, but since the end of 2012, also to a slowing in core inflation: from 1.9% at end 2012 to 1.2% in February 2015. The question of inflationary risks has been debated within the UK Monetary Policy Committee for many months now: growth and low unemployment are potentially harbingers of short-term inflationary pressure, if one accepts that the economy is once again approaching full employment. In fact, the continuous decline in inflation since 2012, coming amid low wage increases, a more expensive pound and falling energy prices, has put off the prospect of an acceleration in short-term inflation. For the moment, the members of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee are voting unanimously for the status quo.

Long-term interest rates on government debt remain at low levels, which was one of the goals hammered at by the Conservatives during the 2010 electoral campaign. In fact, UK rates are moving in much the same way as US rates, in line with similar growth prospects.

Despite this relatively good record, the British economy is still fragile.

The vulnerabilities of the British economy over the medium term

Household debt continues to be high

Household debt had reached record levels before the 2007 crisis, and at that time represented 160% of household annual income. Since then, households have begun to deleverage, with indebtedness falling to 136% at end 2014, which is still well above the 100% level of the 1990s. This deleveraging is lessening households' vulnerability to a further economic slowdown or to a fall in the price of assets (especially property), but this also has the effect of reining in private domestic demand, while the household savings rate remains low (about 6%) and growth in nominal and real wages moderate. The rebalancing of domestic demand should continue, especially in terms of business investment.

Business investment is catching up

Business investment was structurally weak in the 2000s in the UK. But the recovery has been underway for 5 years, and the rate of investment volume is now close to its level of the early 2000s. The recovery of investment is obviously good news for the UK's productive capacity. But there is still an external deficit, a sign that the UK is struggling to regain competitiveness, at least with regard to the trade in goods. The stabilization of the trade deficit at around 7 GDP points in 2014, however, was due to the goods deficit being partially offset by a growing surplus in services (5 GDP points at end 2014), a sign that the UK economy still has a high level of specialization in services. Nevertheless, taking into account the balance in income [\[3\]](#), the current account deficit came to 5.5 GDP points, which is high.

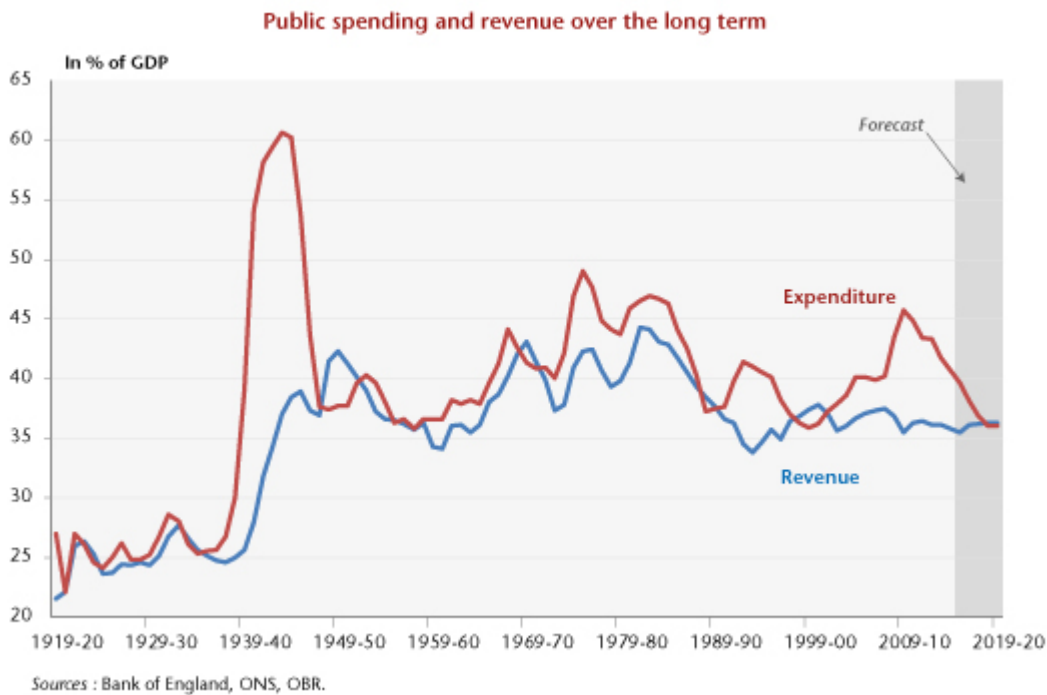
The deceptive appearance of the public finances

In 2010, the Tory campaign blamed the previous government for letting the deficits mount during the crisis. Their electoral programme included a large-scale fiscal austerity plan, which corresponded to the archetypical IMF plans: 80% spending cuts

and 20% revenue increases over a 5-year horizon. In fact, as soon as they came to power, the government increased the VAT rate, which in 2010-2011 interrupted the recovery; it cut spending, while preserving the public health system (NHS) that the British hold so dear, as well as public pensions, which are low in the UK, but which the government decided to peg to inflation or wages (using whichever is the higher of the two variations, with a guaranteed minimum of 2.5%).

Five years later, David Cameron is highlighting the “success” of his government, which has cut the public deficit in half, from a level of 10% in 2010 to 5.2% in 2014. But with respect to the government’s initial ambitions, this is in fact only a partial success: its first budget in June 2010 set out a public deficit of only 2.2% of GDP in 2014. The originally planned decrease in public expenditure relative to GDP was in fact realized, but revenue rose much less than expected (due in part to sluggish household income).

While the austerity programme was generally weaker than what had been announced, in the March 2015 budget the government set out sharp cuts in public spending by 2019, which would bring it down from the current level of 40% of GDP to only 36% of GDP, one of the lowest levels of public spending since World War 2 (graphic). This reduction in public spending would be sufficient in itself to balance the public deficit, without any significant tax hikes: this would represent large-scale budget cuts, whose components are not specified and which it is hard to imagine would not sooner or later affect spending on health care and pensions, which the government has so carefully avoided doing up to now...



[\[1\]](#) “We are the jobs factory of Europe; we’re creating more jobs here than the rest of Europe put together” (Speech on 19 January 2015).

[\[2\]](#) “Self-employment: what can we learn from recent developments?”, *Quarterly Bulletin*, 2015Q1.

[\[3\]](#) But the deficit of the balance of direct investment income (2 percentage points of GDP) is probably inflated by the relatively good performance of foreign companies operating in the UK in comparison to British companies operating abroad.

Renewed growth in the United

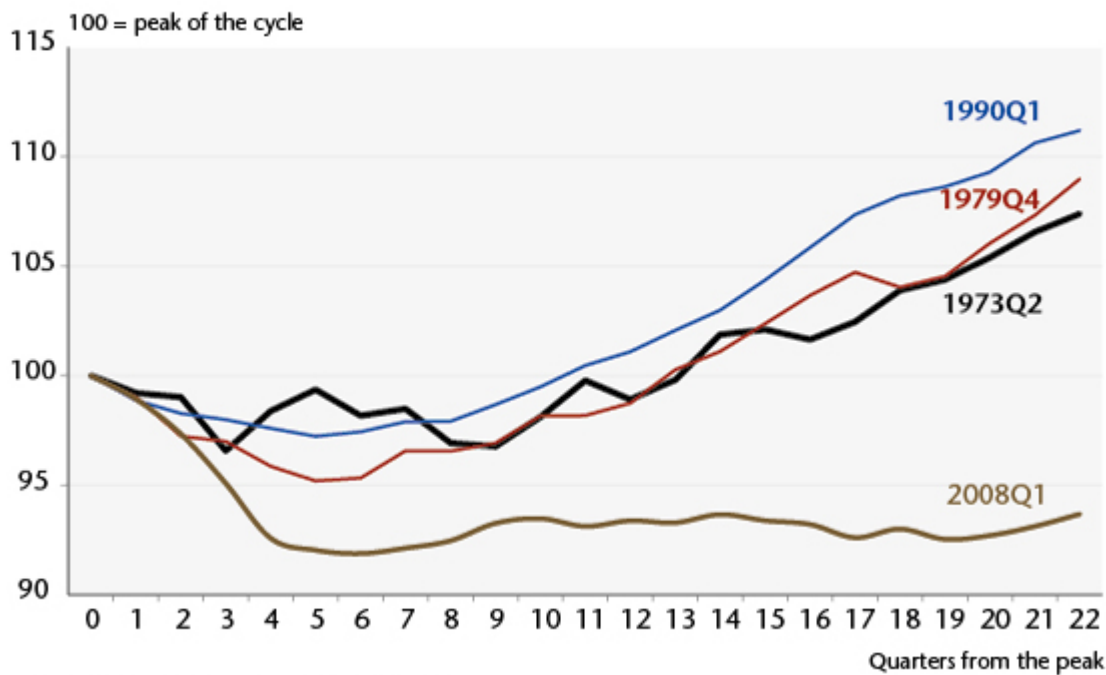
Kingdom in 2013: trompe-l'oeil effects

By [Catherine Mathieu](#)

The latest estimate of the British national accounts, published on 27 November, confirmed GDP growth of 0.8% in the third quarter of 2013, following 0.7% in the second quarter and 0.4% in the first quarter. This represents a sparkling performance for the UK economy, especially in comparison with the euro zone. GDP was up 1.5% year on year in the third quarter of 2013 in the UK, against -0.4% in the euro zone, 0.2% in France and 0.6% in Germany. In the eyes of some observers, Britain's return to growth shows that fiscal austerity does not undermine growth ... on the contrary. But the argument seems at a minimum questionable.

Let's look at the numbers a little more closely. Admittedly, GDP is up 1.5% year on year in the third quarter, but it rose by only 0.1% in 2012 and is still 2.5 percentage points below its pre-crisis level: this does not really represent a great success. Even more striking has been the change in GDP since the start of the crisis: GDP initially fell 7 points between the first quarter of 2008 and the second quarter of 2009; the recovery then got underway, allowing GDP to rise 2 points in the third quarter of 2010, before it fell again. The GDP trajectory since the third quarter of 2010 has been quite unusual with respect to recoveries from previous crises (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Change In British GDP during recessions and recoveries



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS).

In 2008, the United Kingdom was one of the first industrialized countries to implement a recovery plan. Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Tony Blair government, lowered the standard VAT rate by 2.5 percentage points in December 2008 in an effort to boost household consumption. The measure, which was announced as temporary, was ended in late 2009. In 2009, fiscal policy was highly expansionary, with a fiscal impulse of 2.8 percent of GDP following a 0.6 point impulse in 2008 (Table 1). The public deficit increased under the dual impact of the recession and fiscal policy, as did the public debt.

In May 2010, the Conservatives won the election on a programme focused on reducing the public debt and deficit. This was supposed to ensure market confidence and maintain the AAA rating of Britain's public debt, and thus keep the interest rate on the debt at a low level. This was combined with a very active monetary policy, with the Bank of England maintaining its key rate at 0.5%, buying government securities and making great efforts to facilitate the refinancing of banks and kick-start lending to businesses and households. The resumption of growth was supposed to come from business investment and

exports.

The fiscal policy implemented by the David Cameron government has therefore been highly restrictive. At first, the measures focused on increasing revenue by raising the VAT rate and cutting spending, including on social benefits. The resumption of growth was interrupted. Fiscal policy had also become restrictive elsewhere in Europe, so economic activity slowed in the UK's main trading partners. In 2012, fiscal austerity was sharply curtailed (Table 1). The growth figures in recent times are a long way from demonstrating the success of austerity.

Table 1. Growth and fiscal Impulses In the United Kingdom since 2008

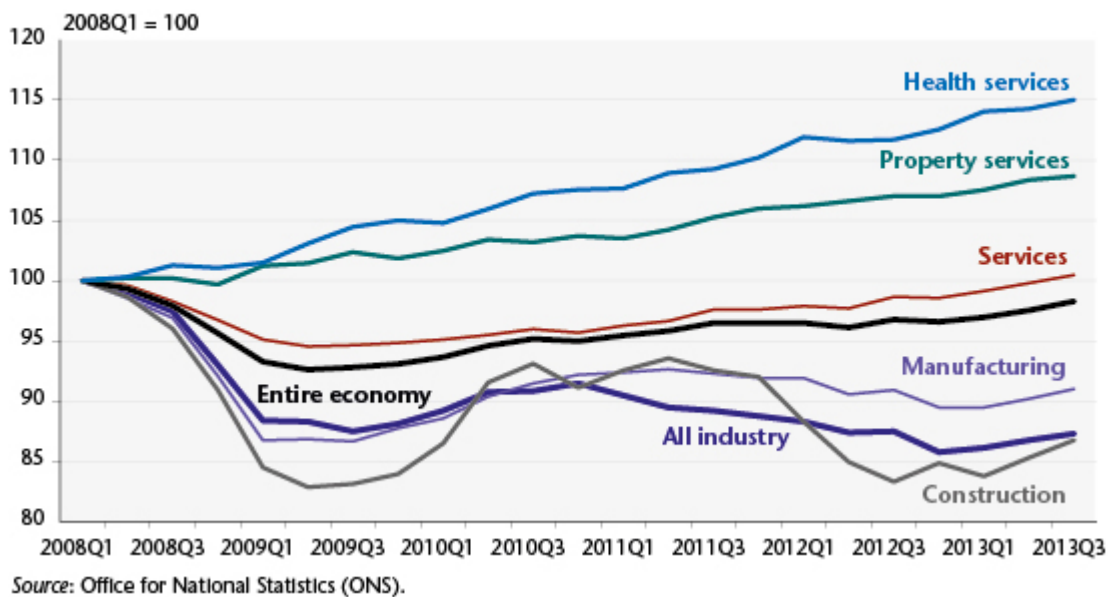
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Growth	-0,8	-5,2	1,7	1,1	0,1
Fiscal impulse	0,6	2,8	-2,7	-3,2	-0,5

Sources : Office for National Statistics (ONS), OECD, author's estimates.

It is also important to note that David Cameron has excluded health expenditure from his cost-cutting plan. The British are attached to their public health care system, and the newly elected Conservatives were determined in 2010 not to repeat the mistake made in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was head of government. So fiscal austerity has not hit the health sector. The result is clear in terms of activity: value added (by volume) in the health sector is now 15 points above its pre-crisis level – in other words, it has continued to grow at an average annual rate of nearly 3% (Figure 2). The second sector where activity has remained strong since 2008, and which has even accelerated since the end of 2012, is real estate. Property prices in the UK had risen sharply before the crisis, leading to record household debt, and have not dropped much since then. Indeed, they have remained historically high and even begun to rise from 2012 (at an annual rate of about 5%). But other sectors are lagging behind. Most services have for instance only now regained the level of pre-crisis output, and some of them are still well below this level: -9% for

financial services and insurance, which is comparable to the figure for manufacturing, while output in the building sector is down 13%.

Figure 2. : Changes in added value (in volume) by sector since the onset of the crisis



Since 2008, British growth has thus been driven in part by a public service spared from fiscal austerity and by real estate services supported by an ultra-active monetary policy... The British recovery could, moreover, give birth to a new housing bubble. Household consumption is now the main engine of growth (Table 2). The failure of investment to pick up represents one of the main setbacks suffered by the supply-side policy implemented since 2010 by the government. The government wants to make the UK tax system the most competitive in the G20, and to this end has slashed the corporate tax rate to the lowest in the G20 (the rate, lowered to 23% this year, will be only 20% in 2015). But business investment has nevertheless not picked up again. The government is also relying on exports to drive growth, but given the economic situation prevailing in Britain's main foreign markets, in particular the euro zone, this is just not realistic. After having experienced sustained growth in previous quarters, boosted by strong sales outside the European Union until the summer, exports have contributed to a sharp fall-off in growth in the third quarter (-0.8 GDP point). As the British government prepares to present its

budget on 5 December, support for fiscal policy would be welcome to help keep the UK economy on the road to recovery in the coming months...

Tableau 2. Contributions of demand components to growth

In GDP points (except GDP)

	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half
GDP, in %	1,3	0,8	0,4	0,6	-0,3	0,2	0,6	0,8
Household consumption	0,2	0,6	-0,6	0,1	0,5	0,4	0,6	0,5
Spending by general government	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,4	-0,1	0,1	0,1
GFCF	0,7	0,2	-0,4	0,1	0,5	-0,8	-0,2	0,2
Productive private	0,6	0,0	-0,2	0,1	0,4	-0,5	-0,2	0,1
Change in inventory	1,0	0,4	0,0	0,6	-1,0	0,7	-0,2	0,9
Foreign trade	-0,5	-0,3	1,5	-0,2	-0,6	-0,0	0,2	-0,9
Exports	1,1	1,1	0,7	0,2	0,1	0,3	0,2	-0,8
Imports	-1,5	-1,4	0,8	-0,4	-0,6	-0,3	-0,0	-0,1

Note: Half-year contributions, except * 3rd qtr contributions. The sum of the contributions may not correspond exactly to GDP growth, due to rounding.

Source: Office for National Statistics.