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Can the EU survive after Brexit?

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Tomorrow, the European Union will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which began the "European project" of closer integration between major European countries. The United Kingdom was not at the table 60 years ago – and, soon, will not be in the community at all.

These have not been easy years for the EU. The financial crisis started it, but the rise of populism across the continent, the disconnect between European elites in Brussels and the people across a vast and diverse continent and a major migration crisis have buffeted the union as never before. And then came the spectacular blow of Britain voting to leave. Britain's media is obsessed with the idea of what will happen to the country after Brexit. But what will happen to the European Union?

The EU, after all, is two very different things. It is the institution – its policies, personalities and public image – and it is the very idea of a united Europe, the idea of Europe as a continent with a common history and a common destiny.

Few are in love with the European Union as an institution, but many, on balance, prefer it to the alternative. When a survey of 10 EU countries was carried out last year, opinion was split down the middle. But the detail was more interesting: while significant percentages of the public in

Greece, France and Spain disliked the EU, an overwhelming majority of those in Poland and Hungary were in favour.

And those are just the ones inside the club. With Russia flexing its muscles yet again, there are many countries outside – Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – who are waiting to join. Even Turkey, which has had a difficult relationship with the EU, wants closer ties. Step away from the Brexit hysteria and there is still a belief in a common European destiny in some countries, but it is at least matched by antipathy towards the institution in others.

The fault for that disconnect lies with the EU itself, which has filled itself with bureaucrats and bizarre policies. The EU can certainly survive without Britain – but it cannot survive without buy-in from the public. Without a substantial change in how the EU communicates to the people in member countries, there will be a much greater threat to the EU than Brexit – and that threat is the EU itself.