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The UK was a driving force within the EU – The Single market and Enlargement were achieved only with British support.

Austria holds the EU-presidency till the end of 2018 and Brexit negotiations should be finalized in October.

At the informal EU-summit in Salzburg last week PM Teresa May came with the „Chequers plan“ and was shown the cold shoulder by her EU-partners. She wants a single market only for goods, not for persons and services. British media called the summit a disaster, and a tabloid attacked European politicians as „EU-rats“. Not only Austrian politicians think that May’s proposal is raisin-picking. UK cannot get a deal which is so good that other EU-members might like a similar treaty.

In Austria the EU is still regarded by a clear majority as a good thing. Only a small minority of Austrians want to leave the EU. In fact, right after the Brexit-referendum EU’s popularity rose in Austria, as in many other EU-countries. People seemed to be afraid of leaving the EU.

The result of the referendum was a shock for many Austrians. The UK is regarded as a part of Europe with its traditions, its music, youth culture, way of life. My first trip abroad as a teenager led me to London in 1969. I was fascinated by the multi-cultural influences. And I have close friends here from that time till now.

With so many lies told by Brexiteers, foreign interference, distortions and use of algorithms by Cambridge Analytica, this referendum cannot be regarded as an expression of the free will of UK-citizens or as a signal of democracy.

And isn't it strange that recently the Tories in the European Parliament voted against the EU-procedure against Hungary. They side with an autocratic leader, Victor Orbán, instead of fighting for democratic values.

Today we heard very often of the blockades which the UK set up on policies in the EU. But it was not all negative or about Mrs Thatcher wanting „her money back“.

Britain was a pragmatic force inside the EU, which fought for two important goals in the EU successfully: The Single market and Enlargement. It was Lord Cockfield who set up the plans for the single market. And the UK was a driving force behind enlargement. So it is ironic that the UK now wants to hold back migrants from Poland and other new EU-countries which Britain was keen to have as part of the EU. At that time the UK-government rejected any transition period to protect its labour market which eg Germany and Austria imposed.

The UK could count on the solidarity of its EU-partners. Take the Skripal-case. Apparently PM May first called US-President Trump after the nerve-gas-attack in Salisbury. Trump was not ready to help. But the 27 partners condemned the attack obviously committed by Russian agents and introduced additional sanctions against Russia, expelling a lot of Russian diplomats. I feel very much ashamed that President Putin was invited to come to attend the marriage of Austria's foreign minister, Karin Kneissl.

A word about the Ireland-problem: in 2012 the EU got the Nobel Peace prize for its peacekeeping efforts, mainly in the conflict around Northern Ireland. Now it turns out to be the stumbling block in the negotiations. When the AEJ organized a seminar in the European parliament last year I remember the warnings of MEP Martina Anderson from Sinn Fein, who said clearly that she is afraid that violence might break out again if border-controls would reappear.

I am sure, that neither the government nor the Brexit-proponents thought of that danger.

Let me thank again William and all members of the UK-section for this great event. And allow me a final word about myself. Today we heard that specially young people are not familiar with the EU. Here is my contribution: In 2003 a colleague and I wrote the first text-book about the EU for pupils called „EU for you!“. Just recently the 5th edition came out in Austria. Apart from that it exists now in six foreign language editions in Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Romania, Montenegro and we have also a small Turkish edition.

Next year we will also have an English edition. I am afraid, too late for Great Britain.