

FINANCIAL TIMES

UK's EU referendum

Executives warn of negative consequences for Europe of Brexit

European Round Table of Industrialists says 'unravelling' of EU would reduce prosperity



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by: **Sarah Gordon**, Business Editor

Fifty-one chairmen and chief executives of Europe's leading multinational companies have warned of the negative consequences of a [British exit from the EU \(http://www.ft.com/eu-referendum\)](http://www.ft.com/eu-referendum), for the rest of Europe as well as the UK.

In a [letter to the Financial Times \(http://next.ft.com/content/816e3c04-2428-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d\)](http://next.ft.com/content/816e3c04-2428-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d), the members of the European Round Table of Industrialists — including Vodafone chief executive Vittorio Colao, Rolls-Royce chairman Ian Davis, ArcelorMittal chairman Lakshmi Mittal; and the CEOs of Moller-Maersk, Royal Dutch Shell, Nestlé and Siemens — said Europe was at a “fork in the road” and that an “unravelling” of the EU's single market and its rules would reduce prosperity.

“While respecting the decision of the people in the United Kingdom, we believe that a Europe without the UK would be weaker, just as the UK itself would be weaker outside Europe,” they wrote. “We believe the case for Europe has never been stronger.”

Letter



(<http://next.ft.com/content/816e3c04-2428-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d>)

Europe without the UK would be weaker and less prosperous

(<http://next.ft.com/content/816e3c04-2428-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d>)

From the European Round Table of Industrialists

Over the past 60 years, the group said, “businesses have flourished and families have generally become more prosperous thanks to closer ties between people and institutions across Europe”.

It argued that the EU’s size gave it “tremendous” bargaining power in international trade negotiations as well as an ability to defend jobs and industries against external threats.

ERT (<http://www.ert.eu/>) members’ companies have annual revenues of €2.1bn and sustain about 7m jobs in Europe, including in the UK.

The group advocates policy change and has close ties with national and regional governments.

Benoît Potier, chief executive of France’s Air Liquide and chairman of the ERT, said Europe faced urgent challenges that could not be addressed by member states acting alone.

From a business perspective, these included ensuring the security of energy supply, creating a digital single market, strengthening oversight of the banking system to avoid a repetition of the financial crisis, allowing small businesses to tap into capital and human resources across borders, and improving Europe’s education systems.

Mr Potier said it was especially urgent to co-operate across borders because of terrorism and the refugee crisis.

“Policymakers both at European level and in the member states should keep in mind the need to foster European competitiveness and cohesion, especially because markets become more and more global,” he said.

“That is the only way we can achieve sustainable growth and enhance job prospects, especially for young people and future generations.”

The letter from the ERT adds to a chorus of concern from the big business community, both inside and outside the UK, about the consequences of a potential British exit from the EU.

This month, 15 business leaders, including the heads of GE, Cisco, Mars and Airbus, [wrote to the FT \(http://next.ft.com/content/cee23c96-1cfe-11e6-a7bc-ee846770ec15\)](http://next.ft.com/content/cee23c96-1cfe-11e6-a7bc-ee846770ec15) to warn that economic uncertainty caused by a British exit “could materially affect major international businesses’ future investment decisions” in the UK.

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