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Welcome to Dover Castle on the south coast of England, which for centuries played a crucial role in the defence of Britain. We're close enough here on a clear day to see France in the distance.

Dover Castle was the headquarters for the battles which ensured Britain's survival from threats across the Channel.

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Now, of course, things are very different.

The UK has joined together in an economic and political partnership with other countries in the European Union. Many laws and important decisions are no longer made by the British Parliament but by the European Parliament in Brussels.

But, unlike most EU countries, the UK has refused to give up its national currency, the pound.

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I'm at a farmers' market in an English town with a French name, Capel-le-Ferne. It's a reminder of the last successful invasion of Britain, almost 1000 years ago, by the Normans.

Here, I have some euros – currency used in many European countries – but can I spend them here?

Amandeep: Hi there. Could I pay for this with some euros? No?

Woman: I don't accept euros.

Amandeep: You don't accept. No? OK. All right.

Man 1: No, I don't think I would like Britain to use the euro because at the moment it's pretty unstable.

Man 2: I wouldn't like to see the UK go down the line of joining the euro.

Amandeep: So as we heard there, Britain's traditional sense of independence remains strong.

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The Channel Tunnel is one way to travel to and from mainland Europe, though many people still use the ferry. On the ferry to France I met Stephen Clarke. He writes about Britain's relationship with Europe.

Amandeep: Why do other EU countries see Britain as a reluctant member of Europe?

Stephen Clarke: Because at the beginning of the European Union, the French didn't want us in the European Union. So they didn't want us in and now we're here, so we're participating but slightly reluctantly because we were the late arrivals at the party. Obviously our past relationship – the wars we've had – it means that now we don't really trust each other. There's something about the past that we can't forget.

Amandeep: OK, let's see what the other view is on this. Agnes Poirier is a French writer.

Agnes Poirier: The fact that Britain is an island might actually explain some of what we consider strange behaviour from the British who don't see themselves as being part of Europe. But when you look at the map ... that's what I often tell my British friends: "Look at the map! You're here, you're with us!"

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I am now in a market in Calais, in France. Let's see what happens when I try to spend British pounds here.

So I got some cheese, bread and flowers. But I had to pay in euros. They weren't interested in British pounds!

We are only 40 kilometres from Dover and many things look the same. But some things are very different. The future relationship between the UK and the EU is something that will keep politicians and journalists busy for a long time.

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