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## [Daniel Hannan](#)

Daniel Hannan is the author of '[How we Invented Freedom](#)' (published in the US and Canada as '[Inventing Freedom: how the English-Speaking Peoples Made the Modern World](#)'). He speaks French and Spanish and loves Europe, but believes the EU is making its peoples poorer, less democratic and less free.

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# Ten reasons to be optimistic about 2014

By [Daniel Hannan](#) [Politics](#) Last updated: December 16th, 2013

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## Life keeps getting better

- 1. The recovery is underway.** This downturn, to the surprise of most economists, has been felt in wages, not in unemployment. Cuts in spending have been more than offset by 1.4 million new private sector jobs in the past three years, and more people are in work than ever before. But while falling unemployment is welcome, it is little consolation to people who haven't had a pay rise in years, and whose bills keep rising. Happily, though, the wage squeeze is relaxing as the economy expands. The UK grew eight times faster than the eurozone in the last quarter and, according to the Office of National Statistics, real wages will [start rising again in 2014](#).
- 2. People are being rescued from the squalor of welfare dependency.** Five years ago, in large parts of my constituency, every receptionist, every waiter, every shop assistant seemed to be Polish or Lithuanian. Now many of those jobs are filled by Britons: partly because of the welfare cap, partly because income tax has been cut for those on low earnings. The benefits trap, which kept some people off the first rung of the employment ladder, is being disarmed.
- 3. Crime is falling.** The overall number of offences has fallen to the [lowest level](#) since we started counting in 1981. There are competing theories as to why. It may be to do with improved police technology, or with better surveillance. It may be a continuing response Michael Howard's decision to bear down on the crime rate by locking up more criminals. It may simply be that, as Steven Pinker argues, the human race is becoming kinder. Whatever the root cause, it's something to celebrate.
- 4. Life is getting easier.** Millions of small innovations and improvements make our days more comfortable and more convenient. On the most constant measure of wealth – how many hours do we have to work to purchase the necessities – we are better off than ever. I don't know where the next big breakthrough will come. It could be in driverless cars, or in 3D printing, or in genetic technology. If I knew precisely what form it would take, I'd be a billionaire. But I know that it *will* come: it always does.
- 5. The Anglosphere is prospering.** Canada grew by 2.1 per cent in 2012, the United States by 2.5 per cent, New Zealand by 2.7 per cent, Australia by 3.6 per cent. India, for what its worth, grew by 5.4 per cent. The EU, meanwhile, shrank by 0.3 per cent, and the Eurozone by 0.9 per cent.
- 6. Schools are flourishing outside government control.** I recently spoke at a comprehensive at which I had once been a governor. In those days, it was considered a successful lesson if all the children stayed seated throughout. Now, they listen eagerly and ask intelligent questions. Why? Because a philanthropic businessman who knew a thing or two about motivation took it on as an academy and turned it around. More than 2,000 schools have become academies since the election, and Free Schools are springing up everywhere: 80 so far and more in the pipeline. Bad teachers can now be sacked, and good ones paid more. Grade inflation has been brought to an end. Things keep getting better.
- 7. We are regaining control of our borders.** When Labour took office in 1997, it set about what can only be called a calculated relaxation of immigration policy through family reunification,

asylum claims and the non-enforcement of deportation orders. Net inward migration rose from 50,000 in 1997 to 250,000 in 2000, and nearly four million people entered the country over the lifetime of the Labour ministry: a number for which I can find no adequate superlative. The present government has reduced non-EU immigration, issuing fewer work permits, tightening visa restrictions closing down bogus colleges, and net immigration has fallen by more than 30 per cent. Now, ministers have realised that they need similar checks on EU nationals. A moratorium on welfare entitlements looks inevitable, and even a cap on numbers is being considered. This is significant because it makes it even more likely that...

**8. Britain will leave the EU.** At least, we will cease to be full members of what the EU is now becoming. The speed at which public and political opinion has changed is dizzying. Five years ago, even to suggest the possibility of withdrawal was (trust me on this) to place yourself beyond polite company. Now, MPs are earnestly debating the wording on the ballot for the In/Out referendum. It's surely a matter of time before the UK ends up with a Swiss-type deal, inside a common market, but outside the associated political structures. Whether it happens by renegotiation or by Brexit is secondary. What matters is that it will happen.

**9. Scotland will remain in the UK.** Which will give us a great morale boost on both sides of the border. We have, after all, done mighty deeds together. [We forget that too easily.](#)

**10. Britain is still the best place in the world to live.** [It just is.](#)

Not everything is perfect, obviously. All governments make mistakes, including this one. But look at the big picture: we are leading fuller, longer, wealthier, healthier and more fulfilled lives than any previous generation. There are dips and reverses, but the underlying direction is positive, and will be as long as private entrepreneurs outperform state regulators. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer."

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