

Winston Churchill Memorial Lecture

Luxembourg 8th October 2025

Friends with benefits or re-marriage?

What is the United Kingdom's future with Europe ?

It is a particular pleasure to have been invited here to give this talk. My own career has offered me a few opportunities to come to Luxembourg, such as when I was Attorney General and appeared for the United Kingdom in the ECJ. But the emotional connection for me was created by my late father Percy Grieve who was here as a young man from the Liberation of Luxembourg in 1944 until early 1946. It forged friendships for him that lasted the rest of his life and it was his desire to show his family both its importance to him and the beauties of its city and countryside that first brought me here as a teenager. Its presence in family tradition led to my wife Caroline and I leaving the church in which we had just got married to the Marche de la Procession Dansante d'Echternach and it was played again at the end of my father's memorial service after his death some years later.

It is also a privilege for me that this is the Winston Churchill Memorial lecture. I am old enough to have gone to his lying in State in Westminster Hall as a 7 year old and it made a great impression on me. Next year you will remember the 80th anniversary of his visit to Luxembourg in July 1946. He was then in the midst of a phase in his life as the great promoter of an idea of European unity which took in his Zurich speech of September 1946 and led to his chairing the Movement for European Unity conference in The Hague in 1948, which led directly to both the creation of the Council of Europe and the Coal and Steel Community. This is therefore a good moment to reflect on the challenges we face in respect of his vision.

In inviting me, the British-Luxembourg Society also asked me to say something about my father's time here as well as dealing with the specific subject I had chosen, of how Britain's future relations with Europe might evolve after a period of considerable change and instability since the Brexit referendum in 2016. I am very happy to do so as well. For while they might appear different topics, his experiences go to the heart of the issue of the relationship with Europe that has been and is still being debated in Britain.

So I will start with my father. He was born in March 1915, four weeks after his father, aged 29, has been killed at Ypres. By 1921 his two paternal uncles were dead as well, one on the battlefield and the other from the effects of the war. The family background was in the professions and the East India trade-my great grandfather was a Burma merchant and lived there at the start of his career. After a disrupted childhood brought on by his father's death and his mother's search for stability, eventually found in second marriage, my father went to Cambridge to read History and Law in 1934. He was keen to learn French and over the next three years spent his summer vacations there staying on two of them with a branch of a French family with extended relationships and with a British connection into which he was eventually to marry after the war. He qualified as a barrister in 1938 and volunteered for the Army in September 1939, despite rather poor health and eyesight. To his surprise he was immediately commissioned as an officer and sent to Paris to work as a liaison officer with French Military censorship. But he was back in Britain on a course when France fell and the role disappeared. So he was taken out of the Army, became a civil servant in Brendan Bracken's Ministry of Information and went to work for the Free French and General De Gaulle at Carlton Gardens with the task of improving the Free French and the General's profile with the British public-not the easiest of tasks. This lasted until 1943 when the General left for Algiers, giving my father a signed photo thanking him for being "un excellent collaborateur de la France

Combattante”. My father then went back into the Army-properly trained this time-and was assigned to the SHAEF planning in anticipation of the administration of France after its liberation. But his pro De Gaulle views on the need to respect the status and role of his provisional government fell foul of US colleagues and he was moved to the Belgium/Luxembourg section. Thus it was that, as his diary entry records, his section was moved to Paris on 4th September 1944 and then on to Montmedy. The City of Luxembourg was liberated on 10th September and my father arrived there the next day. His diary just says “wonderful welcome” and the next day “started work”.

It is difficult today and I suspect was difficult even then, if one was not present, to comprehend what Luxembourg had experienced. At that stage the physical damage was not extensive-that came later with the Battle of the Bulge. But Luxembourg had not just been occupied but de facto annexed to Hitler’s Reich. The use of French was banned and all monuments in French destroyed. In August 1942 conscription had been introduced and 12,000 young Luxemburgers were drafted thereafter, of whom a quarter were to die. 3500 deserted and sought to escape to Belgium or France or went into hiding. A general strike in protest at conscription led to bloody repression and the execution by firing squad of 20 leaders. The Jewish community of around 3500 had been deported and only 36 survived the war. By the end of the war in 1945 there was the added physical damage as well. 50% of all villages north of Luxembourg had damage and some were destroyed. All this has to be seen in the context of a very small country. The total population in 1940 was under 300,000. As a percentage, it suffered more in loss of life through the war than all other Western European nations.

That Luxembourg had survived all this was due to the courage of its inhabitants and the strong sense of identity that had developed since the country had survived occupation in the First World War. An opinion poll commissioned by the Nazis in October 1941, as a preliminary to annexation, revealed for them the unwelcome fact that 95% of those

polled saw their nationality, identity and language as Luxembourgish. The impeccable actions of their sovereign Grande Duchesse Charlotte, in taking the government into exile, in ensuring that Luxembourg was not forgotten by its allies and in broadcasting to its citizens messages of support and understanding helped maintain hope.

The purpose of the SHAEF military mission was to help restore civilian administration. The Nazis had installed 50,000 civil servants here—presumably because it was thought safer from Allied bombing than Germany. Before they left they had destroyed all the official documents and records of Luxembourg on which they had time to lay their hands. In administrative terms the country no longer existed. It was the task of the SHAEF mission to assist in the restoration of civil administration with the return of the Luxembourg government on 23rd September. It was led by a US officer Colonel Frank Fraser with my father, a captain, as his GSO. He had the best of working relationships with Fraser, a National Guard reservist from Arizona who placed great reliance on my father's fluency in French and diplomatic skills. There was a small military staff in support. Later they were joined by Colonel Roger Lambert, a banker in civilian life who came in part to help restore the banking system and later headed the British Military Mission when the unified SHAEF mission ended. They set up their mess in the former residence of the Gauleiter Simon and had the benefit, my father told me, of his excellent wine cellar. Prince Jean, serving with the Irish Guards, but detached to go to Luxembourg for its liberation, messed with them as often did Prince Felix, a Brigadier in the British Army who had also returned.

My father's diary is short on the details of his daily activities. But well beyond the end of the war in May 1945 there was much to do. An archive document of that date details representations to the Mission on the need to free up hotels which were 100% occupied by the military,

so as to provide accommodation for returnees and political prisoners freed during the Allied advance; the critical state of agriculture requiring the return of 3500 horses and 35,000 head of cattle, along with buses, tractors and cars all looted in the German retreat. Other urgent issues were the location of 200 tons of animal hides in Germany needed to restart the tanning industry and the need for iron ore and coke to sustain the steel works.

In the initial stages there was also a law and order problem with revenge being taken on collaborators by a milice of résistants.

Interspersed in the diary is the revival of social life. There may have been rationing but the mess entertained and he was also out and about meeting politicians and many others working for the revival of civil society. The diary records dinner parties at the home of Victor Bodson and even going to the weddings of his new Luxembourg friends.

In September 1944 it was thought that the war might end in weeks. But it did not. December 1944 saw Luxembourg city under threat and the north of the country occupied again. The Mission staff including my father, accompanied by Prince Jean and Prince Felix would walk the streets of the city on snowy mornings to provide reassurance that the Allied forces were not about to abandon it. The military situation also prevented the return of the Grande Duchesse Charlotte which both she and the Luxemburgers very much wanted. When it did finally happen on 14th April 1945, my father was present, lined up in the photos with the rest of the Mission and the event was etched in his mind for ever. He told me that he had never seen before or since quite such an outpouring of joyful emotion. Un peuple en liesse.

My father was not there for the next celebrations on VE Day. On the 6th May he had received a phone call from a bemused US officer in Jena who informed him that they had just liberated the prison there and found a lady who said she was the Princess of Bavaria and requested the Grande Duchesse be informed. This was Princess Antonia, the

sister of the Grande Duchesse Charlotte and the wife of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. Both had been anti-Nazi and had as a consequence incurred Hitler's particular wrath. Prince Rupprecht had gone into hiding in Italy. She had been in Hungary where she was arrested, tortured and successively imprisoned in Sachsenhausen, Flossenburg and Dachau. So my father and Prince Felix left (he kept the Ordre de Mission and we have it here) and went to fetch her. They stayed in Weimar on the 7th May in the Elephant Haus a hotel that had been a resort for leading Nazis. My father was allocated Goering's suite where the bathroom had gold taps. They drove back the next day with Princess Antonia who insisted that there was no stop, as she would never stay another night on German soil in her life-something which my father saw her adhere to when later that year he escorted her to a house she had in the Swiss Lakes to recuperate. The next day 9th May Guillaume Konsbruck and his wife took him to have lunch with some German relatives who lived in a country house near Trier. A polite, but not, he told me, the easiest of occasions, as relationships torn apart by war started to be remade. On the other hand relations with allies could be prickly. On a visit to the Grande Duchesse, to be decorated at a palace ceremony, General Patton turned to Colonel Fraser and said loudly in my father's hearing. "What is that limey doing here ?" Fraser replied "The Grand Duchess asked him."

Later that month his diary records his presence at the victory parade in Luxembourg on 30th May preceded by a service in the cathedral where he writes "there were a thousand present". He also related a visit to Vianden with the Grande Duchesse Charlotte. The town had been flattened but the medieval ruins of the castle still loomed above it. When the Grande Duchesse expressed her sadness at the destruction to the bourgmestre he replied- "Oui Madame mais heureusement nos ruines sont intactes". Later he joined in the dancing through the streets of a ruined Echternach to celebrate St Willibrord, a ceremony that had been banned by the Nazis.

This life of military diplomat and administrator continued through to 1946 when my father left to go and act as a prosecutor of war crimes in Germany before demobilisation and a return to being a barrister. But he left with powerful memories of his time here and a sense he had been able to be of service. His experiences here were also central to the subsequent conviction he carried throughout his legal and political career that a free and united Europe was the prerequisite for our collective security and well being.

In this he was not, as a Briton, alone. When the 2016 referendum was taking place and I was out campaigning, I was struck by the fact that if I happened to ring on the door of a house occupied by someone old enough to have served in World War II-there were a few more then, I almost invariably got the response that they were voting Remain. If on the other hand the person was a child of the baby boom period of the 1940s and 50s, the replies were much more mixed. It marks perhaps the difference between living with the conscious knowledge of the grim realities of war and those offered through the prism of Lion's Book of War Adventures to which I was exposed in my childhood and which left one with the happy but mistaken notion that Britain had won the war single handed.

Because, if anything marked my father's generation, from their experience of growing up after the First World War and then military service in World War II, it was the reality and limits of British power. In their childhood, the romance of continuing British imperial grandeur was deep rooted. A future leading UK politician such as Edward Heath started his career as debater at the Oxford Union patriotically defending Britain against a motion that it was "a declining power". He then had to witness with his contemporaries how the rise of Nazi Germany was being handled through a policy of Appeasement and the immediate consequences of that policy in the Nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War and the destruction of Czechoslovakia, because in reality Britain did not have the means or the will to challenge what was

happening. This was a hard awakening. A later motion in the Oxford Union in October 1938 had Heath deploring “Peace without Honour”. The experience of the limits of British power was reinforced in World War II. British participants knew very well that on our own we could not win the war. It also exposed those serving in theatres of war in which the USA was involved such as in North West Europe, to the scale of the power that the United States now possessed and to the reality that our interests were not necessarily aligned with that of the USA when it came to a post war settlement or indeed what future role Britain might play globally. My father, much as he appreciated working with his US colleagues here in liberated Luxembourg was in no doubt on this point. He used to joke that he spent a lot his time there explaining to US visitors that Luxembourg, despite its size had no wish to be absorbed into Belgium-something some of these interlocutors seemed keen to promote.

Leaving aside the withdrawal from Empire, often hastened by US pressure, as those interests continued to diverge despite a subsisting military alliance, post-war the reality of Britain’s economic problems and decline were also overwhelming. It was not just our relative decline against the USA which had been going open since the 1870s in terms of GDP per capita-76.6% of ours for the USA in 1870 but 137.8% by 1950. It was that our prosperity in relation to our European neighbours and like competitors was sliding. In 1950, France enjoyed 74.7% of the UK’s GDP per capita and West Germany 61.7%. By 1973 France was 6.6% above ours and West Germany 9.3%. Even in the so called golden years of economic growth in the 1950s when Britons were told “we had never had it so good” our growth lagged consistently behind theirs-an overall shortfall for that period of a significant 20%. We invested less and improved technology less than they did. In 1950 11.7% of the UK labour force had intermediate level qualifications whereas in Germany it was 15.1%. By the late 1970s the German figure was 65.4%

and Britain's 28.6%. A tax system more conducive to growth would have broadened the tax base, reduced high marginal rates-the top rates of income tax were 97.5% in 1950 and still 88.75% in 1973 and shifted more to indirect taxation. We were unable to shake off the delusion that nationalisation of industry worked. By 1971, nationalised industries took 18.7% of all investment, employed only 7.2% of the workforce and generated just 10.2% of GDP. At the time it was said that Government ministers could choose winners whereas in reality losers chose ministers.

In fairness to all post war governments, Britain's problems were of historic origin. The 1906 Trade Disputes Act, by giving Unions immunity from a claim in Tort for strikes, enhanced Union bargaining power and created a political imperative to appease organised labour and keep unemployment low through wage restraint which required Union leaders to co-operate, which they often did not. This induced weak competitiveness in product markets and the response of nationalisation and protectionism, including imperial preference, with the average tariff rates on manufactured goods imported into the UK 14.5% in 1960-just like Trump's. We called ourselves a liberal market economy, but it was weak, avoided market competition, lacked investment and covered management failure in raising productivity with price fixing and cartels. In so far as it led to supernormal profits and managers salaries these were shared with Unions in higher wages and lower efforts. It was obvious to those living through this that the UK economic model was not working. Moreover its shaky foundations were disintegrating through global realities. Commonwealth share of imports and exports fell from nearly 50% in 1954 to 20% by the time we joined the EEC in 1972, by which time trade with the EEC had already risen to 42% of British exports.

This was the background to British attempts to join the EEC in the 1960s and to Harold MacMillan, Harold Wilson and Edward Heath's persistence in attempting it, despite President De Gaulle's two vetos

and the political humiliation for those first two governments which came with them. Entry was, of course, vociferously debated, because of concerns of loss of sovereign autonomy and the very fact that it would mark a break with a cosy but failing economic system and thus have adverse impacts on those who directly benefitted from it. The terms of our accession undoubtedly had some unfairnesses built into them because of the inevitable jostling for political advantage by the existing member states. That is the inevitable problem of being in the words of diplomacy a “demandeur”. But is noteworthy that at the outset of negotiations Jean Monnet, hostile to De Gaulle’s nationalist position, was convinced that the UK’s best route was to accept all the Community’s rules, as our application to join would then be politically impossible to reject and we would once in, be able to challenge the French protectionist and chauvinist tendencies he himself deplored, from inside. While this did not happen, Monnet’s original advice proved to be correct. Once in the EEC, the United Kingdom was, by making a reasoned nuisance of itself, able to secure changes to our terms of membership. Harold Wilson got a correction to our budgetary contribution in 1975 and the benefit of the creation, as a further *douceur*, of a European Regional Fund which might directly benefit us. Margaret Thatcher was able to follow that up with obtaining further budget concessions, negotiating the British rebate in 1984 and John Major by securing those opt outs from the single currency and the Social Chapter.

In 2016, Boris Johnson, in one of his “bon mots” said that the EU “is a graveyard of low growth”. This had some truth in relation to the period after 2008. But it makes the prospect of the, as yet, unmaterialised high growth outside the EU look extremely exciting, as the UK economy in fact grew 103% from 1973 to 2016, outperforming overall German growth at 99%, France at 74% and even the USA at 97%. He might also have wished to consider that UK growth from 1872 to 1914 was 0.9% averaged annually compared to 2.1% in that same

1973-2016 period. As the Social Market Foundation Report by the economist Nicholas Crafts set out in 2016, joining the EEC increased trade over the first 15 years by over 21% and raised real incomes by 10%. It took a bit of time to work through, but it was the essential foundation to UK growth in the late 1980s and Margaret Thatcher understood its significance well enough to become the unlikely champion along with Jacques Delors of the creation of the Single Market.

I don't want to embark this evening on revisiting the arguments on both sides at the time of the 2016 referendum. But my involvement in it left me in no doubt as to the reasons why there was a narrow majority voting Leave.

First is the hard truth that for much of Europe, Luxembourg perhaps excepted, we have failed since the 2008 financial crash to deliver reasonable levels of growth. For many in Britain, the living standards of 2016 were lower than in 2008. Public dissatisfaction about this was harnessed by those advocating Leave into a political-economic theory that once outside the EU, a UK free of regulatory burdens and EU bureaucracy would flourish better as a participant in global markets.

But more important still is the identity crisis that besets Europe in the 21st century. Modern Europe has been about the emergence of Westphalian states which have sought to develop distinct national identities and loyalties. The creation of the European Community was intended to be about developing co-operation and common institutions, not about destroying these national foundations which, whilst sometimes linked to aggressive nationalism and authoritarianism have also been a key to the formation of institutions underpinning freedom and parliamentary democracy. This was something Churchill made clear repeatedly in his post war calls for European unity. But as I found on the doorstep in 2016 many believed that the EU was creating a threat to national identity through freedom of movement and the high

immigration levels that this was generating. There was in fact little evidence that integrating migrants from the EU was creating problems in the UK outside of a limited number of rural areas where there were high levels of settlement for agricultural work. But when linked to the fears being generated about the EU's externally porous borders and the vast migratory influx coming from the Middle East and Africa, it was quite enough to deliver the Leave vote majority. As important, in my view, was the failure over a generation for mainstream politicians, of which I count myself one, to make a robust and positive case for our membership. It was always easier to criticise the shortcomings and failings of the EU, of which there have inevitably been a good number, than to explain and support the benefits of membership. It was telling that when David Cameron urged his own Conservative MPs in April 2016 that "we must get real" about membership, it came after years of his own very public Euroscepticism. Thus, as I saw at the time, his call fell on many deaf ears. Elsewhere in Europe this crisis in self confidence about future prosperity and identity has been apparent in the rise of right wing and left wing parties advocating radical solutions, but it has not yet generated anywhere else a sustained crisis on EU membership itself.

When we consider where the UK is now, nearly ten years on from the referendum and five from Brexit itself I do find it hard not to have sense of "déjà vu". We are not quite back to my schooldays in 1974 when I had to do my homework by candlelight as the power got switched off for several hours at a time. But it is undeniable that the sense of malaise has not been assuaged by leaving the EU. It has worsened it. It is currently taking the form of deep pessimism that anything can be done to stop the country from sliding economically and with it there are concerns of social fragmentation from immigration and loss of international standing and fears about national security.

The UK economy is indeed, with some fluctuations, performing sluggishly. Last year we elected a left of centre government full of

earnest good intentions after the abject failure of its right of centre predecessor to deliver on any of its Brexit promises. There is much talk of kick starting economic growth and making Brexit work. The Government is interventionist. It has just nationalised half of our steel industry to save it from closure. It has been generous in a rather 1960s fashion with public money, in buying off other public sector workers, but it is still facing strikes and yet simultaneously promising unions more power and influence in its Employment Bill. It believes that bringing rail travel back into public ownership will make it work better than at present-something which those of us old enough to remember the service provided by British Rail do find slightly surprising. In order to reduce its deficit and provide money for investment in growth it has chosen to tax jobs and job creation rather than break an election pledge and raise income tax. There is much talk of new economic opportunities through developing tech sectors. But then under Harold Wilson in the 1960s we were assured of national revival through the harnessing of the “white hot heat of technology”.

In a ministerial question time in the Commons on the 1st May this year, Douglas Alexander, the junior trade minister, stated in reply to a question about the then impending UK-EU summit. “We are consciously pursuing a trade based agenda based on data, not post imperial delusion and regrettably the data is pretty devastating in terms of the damage done by the way that Brexit was implemented by our predecessors”. This statement so troubled the Prime Minister’s office, however, that it felt it necessary when asked about it to respond with the delightfully opaque utterance “we are proud of our nation’s history but we are also a country that looks forward”.

Douglas Alexander was of course correct. Leaving the EU has on the statistics made little or no difference to where our trade goes. Geographical proximity means that today it remains over 40% of our exports and 50% of our imports just as it was in 2014. What leaving has done, on overwhelming evidence, is to add bureaucracy and cost to

our EU trade, lowered imports and exports generally and in so doing reduced productivity by 4% relative to where it would have been had we remained in the EU. Welcome as they may be, no possible trade deal elsewhere is likely to change this as the government has acknowledged. The so called trade deal with the USA merely palliates a significant deterioration in trade terms brought on by Trump's tariffs and protectionism. Those with India and Australia will only make a minute difference to our trade and GDP. It is worth noting that the current value of our exports of goods and services to Australia (population 26 million) was £16 billion in 2024 and that to Luxembourg an EU member, (population 670,000) £13.2 billion in the same period.

The question therefore is what might be done now to address these problems. We have had the first UK/EU summit in May and some rather tentative steps were taken. But they really are tentative. The Security and Defence Partnership opens the possibility of UK participation in defence procurement programmes but it is about principle and not detail. The same applies to the possibility of youth experience and Erasmus student exchange, business related travel and the recognition of professional qualifications. It is still unclear what detailed agreements will follow to turn this wish list into concrete outcomes.

The one area where we are closest to a fixed agreement favourable to both the United Kingdom and the EU comes with going back into a common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Area with some opt outs for UK agriculture. It would undoubtedly help our farmers and food sector which have suffered badly from post Brexit red tape. EU food producers are also faced with similar consequences if the United Kingdom were to implement its own checks which it has so far chosen not to do because of the problems it would cause to its own domestic consumers-telling evidence of how stupid these barriers to trade are. It is noteworthy that any deal must inevitably put the UK back under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice for the interpretation of

EU law. And even starting that discussion came, predictably, at the cost of continuing the agreement for EU fishing access to our waters until 2038. After the promises from Boris Johnson over Brexit and the criticisms heaped on the then Prime Minister Edward Heath in having to accept the Common Fisheries Policy in 1972 as an accomplished fact in return for the benefits of EEC membership, it is an apt reminder of the realities of being once again a “demandeur” and national interest priorities. As the French might say “plus ca change, plus c’est la meme chose”.

What this negotiation highlights for me is that at present on both sides no one has yet come up with a formula for a sustained revival in UK/EU relations. The British government knows very well that making good the reduction in trade and domestic productivity that Brexit has created is a political and economic imperative. On the EU side there are more pressing issues than relations with the United Kingdom. But it should be obvious to any country with close trade relations with the UK that barriers to trade are not in their national interest either.

The caution of the UK government in seeking a closer rapprochement with the EU comes in large measure from political considerations. The divisive nature of the post Brexit debate has made all the mainstream political parties wary of discussing it. The Labour government is under threat from Reform, a populist party of the right that is progressing largely over deep concern amongst the electorate over illegal immigration through those claiming asylum. The Conservatives are so shattered by last year’s defeat as to be largely incoherent. Anything that suggests a reopening of issues that affect sovereignty, such as agreements that might place the United Kingdom back under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice or might see a return to freedom of movement, remain largely taboo.

Yet curiously, the latest opinion polls do not support the government’s hesitancy. Asked how they might vote in a referendum on leaving the

EU today 52% said they would vote to remain and only 29% to leave with the remainder either not voting or having no idea what they would do. 49% wanted a referendum on rejoining the EU within 5 years and 37% did not, with 14% of don't knows. 38% considered that national sovereignty should always come first and 44% were content for the UK to have to follow EU rules if that boosted economic growth. Interestingly, looking beyond the EU, despite the regular criticisms from UK politicians of the interpretation of the European Convention of Human Rights by the Strasbourg Court and angry calls to pull out of the Convention on the grounds it prevents deportations, 58% of those polled earlier this year wanted to stay in the Convention and only 28% to leave.

Opinion polls can of course be misleading. Furthermore the collapse in any enthusiasm for having left the EU is not matched by an equivalent shift in favour of rejoining even if that is where the trend lies. But it does look fairly clear that the UK electorate is in favour of finding ways to improve trade and contact with the EU at most levels. As Xavier Bettel correctly diagnosed at end of the Brexit negotiations “when the UK was in it wanted opt-outs ; now they are out they want opt-ins”.

A key question for our future relationship seems to be therefore the extent to which the EU is willing to accommodate this. At the time of the Brexit referendum and in the negotiations afterwards anxiety that other countries might seek to follow the United Kingdom's example created a climate where there was a marked reluctance to give us special preferences outside the EU. Theresa May's attempts to achieve some special status fell not just to the intransigence of her backbenchers but to an unwillingness at EU level to really consider this. Today there are quite a few in my country who look with interest to the sectoral agreements negotiated by the EU with Switzerland as a model. But I come across few working within the EU who wish to see it replicated, as it involves constant negotiations to operate. As we have seen with the special status of Northern Ireland and the consequential

creation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, managing special arrangements can be very challenging.

This can be seen encapsulated in the recent negotiations over British participation in Security Action for Europe. The French are happy for us to do so as long as there is only 35% of components permitted from non EU sources. That means in practice their getting the advantage of being able to get British partnership over combat air systems (which they want) without letting in BAE systems as a commercial rival (which they don't). Other EU states such as Germany, Italy and Poland consider this ridiculous and the UK says the offer is so unattractive it may walk away from it.

This debate is not however, taking place in some privileged private bubble, even if at times it sounds very much like it. The threats which exist today to the collective security of every country enjoying the benefits of freedom and democracy in Europe, whether in or out of the EU and which Security Action for Europe was created to address are greater than at any time since the end of World War II. When Philip Ziegler published his biography of Edward Heath in 2010 he saw his subjects scepticism about the special nature of Britain's relationship with the United States as a negative eccentricity and no British Prime Minister since has handled it in the same way as Heath did. But Heath had prioritised the need for a unified European foreign policy within days of joining the EEC and he saw this as working in partnership with the United States and then playing a larger role in the world. He had no romanticisation of the "Special Relationship" and did not see both countries interests as necessarily aligned. In 1971 he spoke to President Pompidou after the US handling of the economic problems of that year, which had involved the US imposing without consultation a 10% import and suspended the convertibility of the dollar. He said "What would happen, if some post Nixon President, threatened to withdraw from the nuclear defence of Europe unless its monetary and commercial conditions were accepted" -a rather prescient comment when viewed

today. For as we are now seeing, Europe's defence and security dependance on the United States may have enabled us all to avoid some hard choices on defence expenditure and as I know very well, as a former chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the UK Parliament, benefit in Britain from the intelligence sharing of UKUSA and 5 Eyes, but it leaves us badly exposed if the relationship breaks down and vital interests diverge, as is now happening, despite the efforts to paper over the cracks. Trump's behaviour to Ukraine suggest a quite different agenda from those of the EU or the United Kingdom, as do his economic policies. And for the United Kingdom it is made worse by Brexit making co-operation with EU partner countries on industrial policy and defence procurement more difficult. Not that the EU is much good at it either. Mario Draghi's comment that Europe is a mere "spectator" in world politics, with "illusions" about its global power and an inability to co-operate appropriately in defence investment rather than protecting inefficient national champions is harsh but carries force. In the United Kingdom, we have held a Defence Review which clearly identifies the risks and dangers we face but then refused to find the means to address them. Just as in the mid 1930s, we seem unable to rise to the challenge of rearmament and the sacrifices that need to be made to achieve this and to ensure that Ukraine is not defeated. The war with dishonour of 1939/40 that followed on peace without honour in 1938 beckons surely for us, unless we come to our collective senses.

This is why the question of whether the United Kingdom might seek or achieve re-marriage, or only friendship with benefits with the EU seems to me to rather miss the point. We cannot reverse what has happened through Brexit. Even if Britain were one day to rejoin, it would not be on terms it had when it left. The EU itself is evolving under the pressures to which it is now subject. What is clear however, is that without a pragmatic willingness to see shared advantage in every action that breaks down barriers to contact, trade and co-operation, the

benefits that a true friendship of shared values can deliver will not materialise and it is our freedom and quality of life which are at risk if we fail. That is our challenge but it brings opportunities, because as Jean Monnet said “Men only act in a state of necessity and only recognise necessity in a situation of crisis”. It was necessity and part of a successful collective response to the biggest crisis for European civilisation that brought my father to Luxembourg in 1944 and shaped his life and as I have increasingly come to appreciate mine as well. Churchill understood it too. At that 1948 Hague conference he said. “We shall only save ourselves from the perils which draw near, by letting national rancours and revenges die, by progressively effacing frontiers and barriers which aggravate and congeal our divisions and by rejoining together in that glorious treasure of literature, of romance, of ethics of thought and toleration belonging to all, which is the true inheritance of Europe, the expression of its genius and honour”.

Just as then, our task in the current crisis must be to work together and the evidence is strong that this is what is wanted by most Britons as well as EU nationals. Where we end up, matters much less than getting started.

Dominic Grieve KC

