

British Eurocepticism

Adriel Kasonta
The Bruges Group



THE BRUGES GROUP

The Bruges Group is an independent all-party think tank. Set up in February 1989, its aim was to promote the idea of a less centralised European structure than that emerging in Brussels. Its inspiration was Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech in September 1988, in which she remarked that "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level...". The Bruges Group has had a major effect on public opinion and forged links with Members of Parliament as well as with similarly minded groups in other countries. The Bruges Group spearheads the intellectual battle against the notion of "ever-closer Union" in Europe. Through its ground-breaking publications and wide-ranging discussions it will continue its fight against further integration and, above all, against British involvement in a single European state.

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He was a Chairman of the International Affairs Committee at the Bow Group think tank (2014-2015), and worked as a UK Project Manager and PA to the UK Chairman at the British Polish Chamber of Commerce (BPCC) in London (2013-2014).

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British Euroscepticism as a sign of homage to the centuries-old tradition of concern for the identity and reason of state of the United Kingdom.

“We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow (...)”¹

I strongly believe that the above quote is the essence of the British understanding of the *raison d'état* concept which “as an overriding interest of the state is caused by the need to ensure the sustainability of this kind of community-like state.”² The idea includes certain values which, because of their recognition by the public are key to understanding its nature and thus the ground of the British anti-European attitudes, accompanying this great country throughout history.

According to this assumption “reason of state, as the value associated closely with the state, which mainly mind state’s welfare and interests, undoubtedly affects the way of understanding these values, contributing to their certain relativisation, always taking into account the specific historical situation.”³ Nevertheless, I believe that this internal political context approach towards a reason of state is not sufficient to explain the main thesis of my writing, therefore, I’m going to

¹ Lord Palmerston, Speech to the House of Commons (1 March 1848), *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. 3rd series*, vol. 97, cc66-123. Online 10 September 2015 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1848/mar/01/treaty-of-adrianople-charges-against#column_77

² Groszyk, H. *Z problematyki pojęcia i funkcji racji stanu*, (in) *Racja stanu*, Olszewski E. (UMCS Lublin, 1989), p. 10.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

complement it with external political approach which “as a system of interest relating to interaction of an actor of international relations with its domestic environment”, is closely related to “international interests”,⁴ also those concerning relations of Great Britain with continental Europe.

⁴ Pietraś, Z. J. *Racja Stanu w polityce zagranicznej państwa*, (in) *Racja...* ibidem, p. 43.

Formation of an early British identity

The English suspicion of Europe (its Christian Transcendentalism and Universalism) sprang naturally from multiple sources.⁵

To locate the ambivalence and disbelief of the idea of Europe, we must go back to the Reformation and beyond.

From the time when Britain became an island of the European continent, she experienced continual traffic and movements of people and ideas, including those from Rome. However, these interactions with mainland Europe, however, did not lessen the continuous impact of an offshore island location, memorably clarified by Gildas in the mid-6th century when he writes that the island of Britain “lies virtually at the end of the world, towards the west and northwest... It is fortified on all sides by a vast and more or less uncrossable ring of sea, apart from the straits on the south where one can cross to Belgic Gaul.”⁶

The sense of an ‘uncrossable ring of sea’ has been extremely potent and has been invoked in the historical play written by William Shakespeare, entitled *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, where we can find this eulogy of England:

*“This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,*

⁵ Smith, A. “‘Set in the silver sea’: English national identity and European integration”, *National identity and euroscepticism: a comparison between France and the UK*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 13 May 2005, p. 6. Online 10 September 2015 http://oxpo.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/national_identity/Smith_Paper.pdf

⁶ Howe, N. *Migration and Myth-Making in Anglo-Saxon England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

*Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England (...)*⁷

The aftermath of the almost mythical vision of the homeland, are these words of the father of modern conservatism, Edmund Burke, who described the British constitution in these words:

*“Our constitution is like our island, which uses and restrains its subject sea; in vain the waves roar. In that constitution I know, and exultingly I feel, both that I am free, and that I am not free dangerously to myself or to others. I know that no power on earth, acting as I ought to do, can touch my life, my liberty, or my property. I have that inward and dignified consciousness of my own security and independence, which constitutes, and is the only thing which does constitute, the proud and comfortable sentiment of freedom in the human breast. I know too, and I bless God for, my safe mediocrity; I know that if I possessed all the talents of the gentlemen on the side of the House I sit, and on the other, I cannot by royal favour, or by popular delusion, or by oligarchical cabal, elevate myself above a certain very limited point, so as to endanger my own fall, or the ruin of my country. I know there is an order that keeps things fast in their place; it is made to us, and we are made to it (...)*⁸

The philosophical and cultural dissolution with continental Europe is symbolised by the English Reformation and was caused largely by fundamental religious dissension having its expression in Protestantism and Puritanism.

Henry VIII's replacement of the Roman Catholic Church with a national church brought a mere transformation of the English nation state that acquired new dimension.

⁷ Shakespeare, W. *Richard II*, Act II. Online 10 September 2015 <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1643>

⁸ Burke, E. *The Writings & Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume VII - Speeches in Parliament; Abridgement of English History*, 2008, pp. 100-101.

Protestantism added a new layer to the English national identity and provided a potent justification for subsequent British foreign policies in the concert of European states, as well as for the foe identification. Nonetheless, it was an early case of religious nationalism, that casted the Continent aside.

This dissenting religion of an obstinate opposition to Papacy and classical continental Roman Catholicism⁹ gave the early national identities a political energy and longevity that has not been fully spent even today, and it was on this foundation of Puritan set of rules, that a sense of English national identity has evolved, forging a movement of national autonomy.

In the *Act in Restraint of Appeals* (1533), the English Parliament boldly decreed that England was an empire entire of itself, free of any entanglements, whether in Europe or further abroad.¹⁰

This national identity was focused on single and unified country, based on the idea that the British constitution descended from free institutions of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the system is based on Common law and everything else stems from “1066 and all that.”¹¹

In the process of development of a nation state, a formation of specifically English law took on a special significance. “*By the 13th century*”, writes Rees Davies, “*English law was regarded as one of the distinctive hallmarks of Englishness and as an integral part of English political culture.*”¹²

This conclusion is also supported by a profound analysis of the British legal system, made by one of the greatest political thinkers, Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote in the *Journeys to England and Ireland* that:

“The English are the first people who ever thought of centralising the administration of justice. This innovation, which dates from the Norman period, should be reckoned one of the reasons for the quicker progress that

⁹ Smith, A. ‘Set in the silver sea’... ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁰ Tanner, J. R. *Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-1603: With an Historical Commentary*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 40-50.

¹¹ Sellar, W. C., Yeatman, R. J. *1066 and All That, 2010*; See also Sherrin, N., Shand, N. *1066 and All That*, 1984.

¹² Davies, R. *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093-1343*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 106.

this nation has made in civilisation and liberty (...) No other people show a clearer record of their institutions, and I am sure that deep research into those times would enable us to explain many things which cannot now be explained in the history of other peoples, as for instance certain maxims of legal procedure which have become laws throughout Europe, but of which we can neither trace the origin, nor account for the reason why people are so obstinately attached to them. Besides that, the customs of the Saxons are interesting in themselves and especially interesting in the context of English history. Their legal procedure is the oddest which has ever existed, and one can find in it all the elements of the present-day procedure, some parts of which we have adopted ourselves.”¹³

¹³ De Tocqueville, A. *Journeys to England and Ireland*. Yale University Press, 1958, p. 23.

We and...them

The late 16th century may be grasped as a key decade in shaping the English anti-European ideology, over the following centuries that have been so distinctive. Rebecca Langlands expresses this as follows:

*“A religious mythology of ‘chosenness’ defined Englishness in opposition to the hostile Catholic states of Europe (France and Spain in particular) and provided the English with a sense of unique identity and destiny.”*¹⁴

Even though the sense of this exceptionality was overwhelmingly shaped in the first and most influential literary concept of Englishness in Venerable Bede’s *Historia of the Gens Anglorum*,¹⁵ the one who is claimed to be an architect of what became the British Imperialist ideology (and thus the divergence from Europe), is John Foxe.

His *Acts and Monuments*¹⁶ with its accounts of the repression of Protestantism under Mary Tudor had widespread influence on English and later British consciousness. In his narrative of martyrdom, a profound mistrust of Roman Catholicism is implicit and it will later become a powerful political and social factor.¹⁷

Due to that fact, the 17th and 18th centuries produced the specific concept of English Pragmatism and philosophical dissolution with the Continent.¹⁸

¹⁴ Langlands, R. *Britishness or Englishness? The Historical Problem of National Identity in Britain*, (in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol.5, No.1, January 1999, p. 59. Online 10 September 2015 <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111%2Fj.1354-5078.1999.00053.x>

¹⁵ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 731. Online 10 September 2015 <http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/bede/bl-bede-contents.htm>

¹⁶ Foxe, J. *Acts and Monuments*, 1563. Online 10 September 2015 <http://www.johnfoxe.org/index.php?realm=text&edition=1563&gototype=modern>

¹⁷ Averill, K. *The ‘Paranoid Style’ in British Politics-anti-Europeanism in Britain as right wing populism*, 03.12.2005. Online 10 September 2015 <http://liblists.derby.ac.uk/items/613C37C2-3B75-D787-FOC4-E9FC7793B0D9.html>

¹⁸ Black, J. *Convergence or Divergence? Britain and the Continent*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

It is the Pragmatism which developed and carried an ideology, which constrained outlooks of British society and British philosophical tradition, where the gradual appearance of what is generally known as ‘social contract’ theory appeared.

In the great pantheon of political thinkers who helped to shape the new climate in which old, encrusted ideas of authority and obligation were quickly discredited, the names of Algernon Sydney, John Locke and David Hume loom large. Theorists like Edmund Burke trace a fairly consistent line of thought grounded in a social contract, natural rights, popular consent, legitimate resistance to authorities and utilitarianism. This penetration of central power left plenty of room for local self-determination, which will later lead directly to nationalisation of identities, realisation of differences between Britain and Europe.

The Enlightenment also played a crucial role in emphasizing and conceptualizing the fundamental differences in individual psychology and Cartesian thinking as opposed to pragmatic, utilitarian, concrete, highly individualist represented by Francis Bacon, John Locke, J.S. Mill, Charles Darwin or Bertrand Russel.

Confirmation of this fact is clearly seen in Gertrude Himmelfarb’s view on the Enlightenment era who contends that the French and British Enlightenments constituted separate and fundamentally different “roads to modernity”—the former radical, abstract, foundationalist, and rationalist and the latter sensible, empirical, pluralist, and pragmatic.¹⁹ She aims to encapsulate the French Enlightenment with the phrase “the ideology of reason,” since (she claims) the “exalted mission” of the philosophes was “to make reason the governing principle of society as well as mind, to ‘rationalize,’ as it were, the world”, in which English undoubtedly championed.

Even though, Voltaire and Diderot were both, broadly speaking, liberals—they both advocated religious toleration, freedom of expression, commerce, legal reforms to limit torture and other inhumane practices, and so on—which is why they both expressed a good deal of admiration for the government and society of 18th century England. Voltaire’s embrace of England’s liberal mixed regime

¹⁹ Himmelfarb, G. *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French and American Enlightenments*. New York, 2004, p. 19.

was not confined to his early *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, but rather spanned his career. As late as the entry on “Government” in his *Questions on the Encyclopedia*, we still find him affirming:

*“In the end this is what English legislation has achieved: the restoration to all men of all those natural rights of which nearly every monarchy deprives them. These rights are: total freedom in matters affecting one’s person and one’s possessions; the right to speak to the nation through the medium of one’s pen; to be judged in criminal matters only by a jury of independent men; to be judged in all cases only in accordance with the precise wording of the law; to follow peacefully any religion one wishes, eschewing posts available only to Anglicans (...) I venture to say that if the human race were assembled to make laws, people would make them like that for the sake of their security.”*²⁰

Diderot’s admiration for England’s government and society is not as well-known as Voltaire’s, but it was no less fervent. Late in life, he went so far as to refer to the English government as:

*“that Constitution which, if not perfect or free of faults, is at least the most well-suited to the condition of the country, the most favorable to its commerce, the most appropriate to the development of genius, eloquence and all the faculties of the human mind; perhaps the only one, since man lived in society, in which the laws have ensured him his dignity, personal liberty and freedom of thought; where the laws have made him, in a word, a citizen, that is to say, an integral and constituent part of the state and the nation.”*²¹

²⁰ Voltaire, *Questions on the Encyclopaedia*, (in) *Voltaire: Political Writings*, ed. David Williams. Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 60–61.

²¹ Diderot, D. *Histoire des Deux Indes*, (in) *Diderot: Political Writings*, ed. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler. Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 189.

Splendid isolation and a significant shift towards the Atlantic

The so-called *Splendid Isolation* era of Gladstone, Palmerston, Disraeli and others was a description of British policy towards Europe at the turn of 19th century, where the Anglo-Saxon Constitutional Federalism was further adjusted to what is generally called the British Imperial Federalism, a severely limited federalist concept infiltrated by the British secular traditions.

The imperial federalism took generally two main forms: the need to unite British colonial territories and the need to retain the unity of Empire which has been perceived as a significant sign of Britain's exceptionality and dissimilarity to Europe in her way of handling its colonies.

Britain followed her own specific interests, created its own world. As colonizers destined to rule, they populated those parts, which they erroneously considered as unsettled. They also established permanent and significant colonies in Africa and Asia, and even where they remained in a substantial minority and where their presence would be transitory they came to develop an important 'illusion of permanence', something that clearly set them apart from Europe, disturbed by revolutionary muddles.

The Federalist idea continued to grow and flourish with such personalities as Lord Acton, James Bryce, Henry Sidgwick, Brooke Foss Westcott or Charles Donald Farquharson.

Furthermore, Gerald Newman, Paul Langford²² or Bernard Crick stress that 'the sense of peculiarities and exceptionalism', central to this notion, developed ironically by host of people of non-English background, namely by David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Fergusson, Edmund Burke, Robert Owen, David Ricardo, Benjamin Disraeli, James and John Stuart Mill (Ricardo and Disraeli being sons of Jewish immigrants).

²² Langford, P. *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

It is apparent that the migration of vast numbers of Britons overseas not only removed the strains of industrial overpopulation, unemployment and poverty; “it also created a new sense of belonging to a global British community, to what will come to existence as *Greater Britain*.”²³

Especially after 1815, this large-scale colonisation also led to forging an Anglophone alliance of Britain, USA and Canada - a major player in the 20th century diplomacy.

Since the 1930s, Britain has suffered an identity crisis. In consequence, a new way of Englishness originated promoted by men like Enoch Powell, Norman Tebbit, Jonathan Clark, John Vincent and others; Englishness in a more narrow and conventional sense, often bordering on fanaticism. It was no longer an opposition to Europe, but an opposition to everything of non-English origin.

As early as at the Geneva Conference 1932, British diplomat Arthur Henderson warned that Britain would not act against the USA or the USSR in any way and later on, the official line of Foreign Office supported by public press pointed out, that Britain should keep the Commonwealth interests in mind, not some immature concepts of continental politicians.

For the United States, Britain and the States were truly bound together by language, culture and liberal political doctrine, where this sentiment is perfectly explained by Count Coudenhove Kalergi:

*“But even so it is not certain that Great Britain would actually put through its membership in Pan-Europe; for while historically and geographically it belongs to Europe it is linked to North America by ties of language, of kinship, and of culture. It might well be that these would prove the stronger ties and that England would seek and find its allies across the Atlantic Ocean-instead of across the English Channel.”*²⁴

Thus, in support of the thesis mentioned above, it is worth recalling Winston Churchill's famous statement addressed to General De Gaulle after his veto regarding Britain's accession to the EEC:

²³ Colley, L. “*Britishness and Otherness: An Argument*”. *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4, *Britishness and Europeanness: Who Are the British Anyway?* (October 1992), p. 189.

²⁴ Coudenhove Kalergi, R. N. *Pan-Europe*. New York, 1926, p. 40.

*“Every time that we have to decide between Europe and the open sea, it is always the open sea that we shall choose. Every time I have to decide between you and Roosevelt, I shall always choose Roosevelt.”*²⁵

Churchill was an icon of British life. It is worth mentioning that everything he did was first and foremost driven by the desire of his own greatness and was serving the purpose of protection and aggrandisement of the British Empire.

Therefore, to fully understand greatness of this national hero, it is worth to recall words of Hugo Young:

*“Anyone wishing to explore the puzzle of Britain’s relations with continental Europe in the twentieth century’s second part must begin with Churchill, and not just because he came first. In the history, Churchill’s record plays as important a part as the aura that came after him. The last begetter of British greatness, he was also the prime exponent of British ambiguity. In him the two strains mingling in Britain’s post-war presentation of herself — illusion and uncertainty — had their most potent source. He epitomized the characteristic consistently displayed by almost every politician, irrespective of party, who came after him: an absence of steady vision on the greatest question concerning the future of Britain in the last fifty years. But he also spoke, none louder, for the reasons why such unsteadiness did not matter: why the issue of Europe could always be the plaything of fickle British politicians, because there always existed other possibilities for Britain, growing out of imperial history and military triumph.”*²⁶

Churchill did not think highly of the Continent. He was at first aware and afraid that its fragmentation could cause trouble for Britain and later wisely realised that the limited unification can vice-versa be profitable for the declining British Empire. His intentions were primary self-serving and long antiquated in

²⁵ Mangold, P., Tauris, I. B. *The Almost Impossible Ally: Harold Macmillan and Charles De Gaulle*, 2006, p. 31.

²⁶ Young, H. *This Blessed Plot. Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*. London, 1998, pp. 6-7.

modern British European discourse. There was the old-fashioned idea behind it that Britain should stay apart from this process as a powerful conductor and controller of this process and would allow only what is beneficial for her.

The one single utterance from him that best sums up the ambivalence of his views on Britain's relationship with Europe is an article he wrote to an American audience in 1930:

*"(...) The attitude of Great Britain towards European unification or 'federal links' would, in the first instance, be determined by her dominant conception of a united British Empire. Every step that tends to make Europe more prosperous and more peaceful is conducive to British interest (...) We are bound to further every honest and practical step which the nations of Europe may make to reduce the barriers which divided them and to nourish their common interest and their common welfare (...) We see nothing but good and hope in a richer, freer, more contented European commonalty. But we have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe, but not of it. We are linked, but not comprised. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed."*²⁷

²⁷ Churchill, W. S. *The United States of Europe*, Saturday Evening Post, 15.02.1930, (in) Wolff, M. *The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill*. Library of Imperial History 1976, vol. II, p. 184.

The rise and life of the Iron Lady as a testament to the future generations of Tories

It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that Young describes this great leader as ‘the last begetter of British greatness’, I would strongly argue that future achievements of Margaret Thatcher make this statement slightly inaccurate.

The Iron Lady (as she later became known) turned out to be a great apologist for the tradition of their ancestors and like them, she chose a priority interest of her nation and homeland, preferring it over the illusory project, supposedly homogenous in terms of culture Europe, which she expressed in these words:

*“Europe’ in anything other than the geographical sense is a wholly artificial construct. It makes no sense at all to lump together Beethoven and Debussy, Voltaire and Burke, Vermeer and Picasso, Notre Dame and St Paul’s, boiled beef and bouillabaisse, and portray them as elements of a ‘European’ musical, philosophical, artistic, architectural or gastronomic reality. If Europe charms us, as it has so often charmed me, it is precisely because of its contrasts and contradictions, not its coherence and continuity.”*²⁸

Although she was expressing her disapproval and uncompromised stance towards Europe for many times during her career as a politician, I honestly believe that *The Bruges Speech* is the essence of it:

“Mr. Chairman, you have invited me to speak on the subject of Britain and Europe. Perhaps I should congratulate you on your courage. If you believe some of the things said and written about my views on Europe, it must

²⁸ Thatcher, M. *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World*, 2002, p. 328.

seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence! (...) The European Community is one manifestation of that European identity, but it is not the only one. We must never forget that east of the Iron Curtain, people who once enjoyed a full share of European culture, freedom and identity have been cut off from their roots. We shall always look on Warsaw, Prague and Budapest as great European cities (...) To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve. Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality (...) Indeed, it is ironic that just when those countries such as the Soviet Union, which have tried to run everything from the centre, are learning that success depends on dispersing power and decisions away from the centre, there are some in the Community who seem to want to move in the opposite direction. We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.”²⁹

From the very beginning the British were extremely afraid of the idea of a strong executive, which arrogates to itself the judicial and legislative power, as the continental tendency to exaggerate and overestimate the executive were already evident before World War II (primarily in France) and the Islanders with their secular inclination, the key common law tradition and distrust of anything that would limit the authority of Parliament, had legitimate and compelling reasons to have this attitude.³⁰

²⁹ Thatcher, M. Speech to the College of Europe (“The Bruges Speech”), 20.09.1988, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Online 10 September 2015 <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=107332>

³⁰ Flinders, M. *Shifting the Balance? Parliament, the Executive and the British Constitution*, Political Studies, 2002. vol.50, pp. 23-42.

European integration was a direct threat to the British political sovereignty which is the cornerstone of ideas defining the Conservative Party and was reflected in the subordination of Westminster to EU law.³¹

In the event of a real threat, the conservative camp was divided into ‘absolutists’ and ‘poolers’, where the absolutists played a key role as their main objective was to maintain the *status quo* of the supremacy of Parliament in Westminster. They claimed that British Parliament is not bound by a written constitution (like most continental Parliaments) to share power with the executive, the Supreme Court or sub-national authority and may invalidate legislation according to its own will.³²

³¹ Baker, D., Seawright, D. *Britain for and against Europe: British Politics and the Question of European Integration*. Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 41.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 42.

Conclusion

The supremacy of Parliament is a refuge of freedom in Britain. The weakening of the sovereignty of Parliament is not only a threat to the independence of the legislative and libertarian tradition but also a threat to the rule of law, which rests on the legal legitimacy founded by elected lawmakers. This kind of legitimacy cannot be ensured by the European institutions which do not have the right to demand obedience from the European citizens, since it rests on national identities embedded in individual states. The so called 'democratic deficit' is getting worse with every interference of EU law in the lives of the people, which is pertinently expressed by Michael Spicer:

“In the United Kingdom it would have the profoundest possible consequences for the very foundations of the constitution. This rests above all on the notion that the people exert their sovereignty through a Parliament which is the supreme authority in the land. An essential element of this supremacy is that Parliament can effect whatever changes it chooses, including, often especially, amending the laws passed by a previous Parliament. The commitment at Maastricht to the ‘irrevocable’ is in direct contradiction to this. However, the fact is that the irrevocable powers have not yet been transferred, and sovereignty is an absolute: you either have final authority or you do not. (I have never been able to understand the ideal of ‘pooling sovereignty’.) In this sense, Maastricht is a torpedo aimed but not yet fired at the keel of British democracy.”³³

It is being continuously emphasized that in Britain, various EU rules are construed as a malign attack on the British way of life which needs to be repelled with the same force as Hitler’s aggression in 1939–1940. “Britons are afraid of the European Union because they are forced to adapt their specific cultural and

³³ Spicer, M. *A Treaty Too Far: New Policy for Europe*. Fourth Estate, 1992, pp. 13-14.

institutional rules and values towards what emerges as a common European norm, which they dislike.”³⁴

Europeanness in the English sense means the British identity being just one among many of roughly the same level. The problem of this identity is, however, that it possesses no real historical/cultural basis; Europe is not yet a distinct territorial entity with its own culture or history. Therefore, it will be for many years to come doomed to be perceived as a rather abstract and artificially made concept, not a mere identity for the British. What is worse, this identity is based on the core of British democracy, which is freedom, trying to replace it with an abstract one, about which Burke wrote:

*“Abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found. Liberty inheres in some sensible objects; and every nation has formed to itself some favourite point, which by way of eminence becomes the criterion of their happiness.”*³⁵

So if by virtue of having a common denominator determining this happiness, “an Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery”,³⁶ this should not surprise us that in the face of another project of European unification, the Puritan spirit of the nation is screaming:

*“Give me Liberty, or Give me Death!”*³⁷

³⁴ Behnisch, A. J. *For Britain, joining Europe was associated with national decline and loss of great power status*. *New Statesman*, 16.12.2002. Online 10 September 2015 <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/144445>

³⁵ Stanlis, P. J. *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings And Speeches*, 1968, p. 189.

³⁶ Carlton, S. *Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America*, 2006, p. 34.

³⁷ It is a quotation attributed to Patrick Henry from a speech he made to the Virginia Convention in 1775, at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, he is credited with having swung the balance in convincing the Virginia House of Burgesses to pass a resolution delivering the Virginia troops to the Revolutionary War leading to American independence of the British Empire. See Patrick Henry Give me liberty or give me death, March 23 1775. Online 10 September 2015 http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/patrick.asp

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