

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Compelling economic arguments are made for the UK's membership of the European Union, not least the importance of the single market in which we do almost half our trade. But equally compelling are the strategic, security and diplomatic interests served by UK membership, interests that would be seriously jeopardised were we to leave the EU.

THE RISK OF HISTORICAL AMNESIA

The construction of the European Union has been critical in ensuring that Europe has enjoyed over sixty years of peace, in stark contrast to the devastation of the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. It is easy to take the current peaceful state of relations between European states for granted; and it becomes easier with every passing decade. The generation that was wasted by the First World War has died out. The generation that fought the Second World War is fast disappearing. Both generations have cause to envy us our easy assumption that peace is the natural European order. The suffering that they endured is a warning not to forget our (very recent) history.

Reconciliation between France and Germany is at the heart of the EU. A European structure has been created that ensures that France and Germany, who fought each other three times between 1870 and 1945, will never do so again. Old animosities and hostilities have been replaced with negotiation and cooperation, facilitated by mechanisms and reflexes that transcend political differences and particular personalities. The historic change this represents, to the benefit of the French and Germans (and their neighbours such as the UK), was vividly demonstrated in January this year. The governments and parliaments of the two countries met in Berlin to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their bilateral Elysee Treaty. This formal expression of Franco/German post war reconciliation is an achievement at the core of, and made possible by, the process of European construction and integration.

THE EU AS STABILISER AND SECURITY SYSTEM

The vision of a Europe of states working closely together within a supra-national framework (the Common Market, then the European Community, now the European Union) has inspired countries across the continent, and has determined the political and economic choices they have made. The result has been the emergence of a Europe of growing stability and prosperity, much to the UK's strategic, security and economic benefit. In the nineteen seventies, the authoritarian, semi-fascist regimes in Portugal and Spain were overthrown and the democratic governments that replaced them welcomed into what was then the European Community. The same was true of Greece. Without the European Community acting as magnet and mentor to these new and hesitant democracies, it is far from certain that the old dictatorships would not have been replaced with new authoritarian forms of government.

The European Union played the same role to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in the early nineteen-nineties, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact. At a moment of enormous, and potentially dangerous, political upheaval and

dislocation, the EU encouraged and mentored the new democracies that emerged from the Soviet wreckage. This was critical to them during a period of very difficult transition. It helped build good relations between them, helped prevent the resurgence among them of old antagonisms and recidivist claims. Subsequent EU membership of the three Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, as fully functioning democracies with market economies, is a profound transformation. This has brought a new stability to Europe politically, which has in turn greatly enhanced the security of the United Kingdom.

The successful integration of these countries into the EU is in marked contrast to the mayhem that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia. The Balkan wars of the nineteen-nineties are a reminder that peace and stability in Europe remains disconcertingly fragile: the fact that the post-Yugoslav Balkan republics now all aspire to EU membership is proof of the European Union's continued power of attraction and welcome power to stabilise the continent.

THE EU AS INTERNATIONAL ACTOR AND MULTIPLIER OF UK INFLUENCE

The European Union has become fundamental to the peace and prosperity of the UK's immediate neighbourhood. It is also a force for peace and prosperity in the wider world, bringing far greater weight to bear internationally than the UK could alone. In a world of emerging multi-polarity, in which Asia, Latin America, and Africa are of rapidly increasing importance, the combined influence of the EU member states is a highly significant asset and force multiplier for the UK. If we are to help sustain and shape a global system that is rules based, sustains open markets, and which champions democracy, human rights and the rule of law, we have a much greater chance of doing so from within the EU than we do outside it.

This is the sort of world that the United States also champions. It looks to the EU as its natural partner and believes that the European Union is much more likely to be effective in this common enterprise if the UK is playing an active and persuasive role at its heart. The Obama Administration has recently made this uncompromisingly clear in public statements. In its view, one shared across the US political spectrum, the US relationship with the UK is enhanced by British membership of the EU and would be diminished if the UK opted to leave. The UK/US relationship is not an alternative to membership of the EU, not an alibi for opting out. The UK's membership of the EU is rather of central importance to why we continue to matter in Washington; central to why we continue to benefit from the special character of our bilateral relationship. Outside the EU, our influence in Europe would be sharply diminished; but so it would be in the United States. The risk to the UK of leaving the European Union is of a rapid drift into international irrelevance.

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