

## **STRONGER IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Foreign Policy speech**

**by Lord Paddy Ashdown**

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A senior German Minister said to me the other day “Whenever I sit down in a room to negotiate with my British colleagues in a European meeting, their first question is always the same – which way to the Exit? You Brits spend so much time trying to find the way out, that you never have the time to build the alliances which are there to be built, to succeed. But now I realise, you would rather go, then win.”

Exactly so!

Canning and Castlereagh would be spinning in their graves.

A couple of weeks ago, I heard Liam Fox on Newsnight go one further. I think I quote him precisely, for I wrote it down at the time: “If we leave, we will bring the EU to its senses”.

Leaving aside the unreality of that statement – as though, the morning after a Brexit vote, millions of European citizens would sit up startled in their beds and say to themselves “Oh heavens! the Brits have left. Now we must come to our senses”.

Leaving aside, the age-old British arrogance about our place in Europe, which lies behind that statement.

Leaving aside also what it tells us of the attitude of senior Brexiteer Tories in this Government, to negotiations with their European partners.

Leaving all these things aside, as an expression of the isolationist mind set of the Brexiteers Dr Fox's belief that "if we leave the Europeans will come to their senses" must rank alongside the famous Times headline - "fog in Channel, Continent isolated" -.

How else can one explain the notion that by pulling out of something, you can change it – unless of course what they actually mean, is destroy it.

Of course Europe needs improvement and reform.

It is, as yet insufficiently democratic. Though not as insufficiently democratic so as our own Parliament, the only one in Europe elected by a non-proportional system in which a Government like this one can be elected on less than a quarter of the popular vote – or our own second chamber, which has no connection with democracy whatsoever.

EU markets do need liberalising.

But the way to change these things, is not to opt out, but to get stuck in.

It's not to leave, but to lead.

That is the true British tradition. That is the true source of our greatness – getting engaged - not retreating behind our island walls and shouting insults at strangers.

## SOVEREIGNTY

At the heart of the decision, Remain or leave, is single question. Which course best promotes Britain's interests abroad and best secures the interests of British citizens at home?

In a word, the Brexiteers are right it IS all about Sovereignty.

But the Brexit case is 100 years out of date. They think that sovereignty still lies, unchanged, where it lay at the height of the British Empire, safely cocooned and protected in the institutions of Whitehall. They say they want to take their country back – that's right – back 100 years to an age which is long past and has little relevance to global the realities of today.

The fact with which we must all wrestle - governments and bewildered voters alike - is that, power has leached away from the institutions of the nation state onto the global stage, where it now lies, largely unregulated, mostly unaccountable and completely unattached to any single belief or moral system.

Here is the truth the Brxiteers refuse to accept: There is now more power to affect the lives of British citizens, lying outside our national institutions and beyond our borders, than lying within them.

We used to be able to divide politics between domestic and foreign. This is now no longer possible.

There is no domestic question that can today be resolved within our domestic institutions alone; not crime, not health, not jobs, not security, not prosperity, not the environment, not transport, not

agriculture, not fisheries, not immigration. Good outcomes on all these - and many more - are best secured – indeed only secured – by working effectively, not just nationally, but internationally with those who share our interest.

Did you notice that the recent maelstrom that threatened to engulf our domestic economy, did not begin in Whitehall - it began with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in New York? That swine flu, was not just a problem for Mexico but for London Heathrow as well? That burning too much fossil fuels world wide, gives us unprecedented flooding on the Somerset levels? That ISIL is an international network, that can only be tackled by an international network? That migration cannot be tackled by nations acting alone with barbed wire, it can only be tackled globally and regionally.

I want Great Britain to Remain in the EU, not because of some romantic notion of our pan-European identity (though I find that attractive) – but because I know that in a world where global forces can overwhelm nations, even medium sized one like ours – it is only by working with our EU partners that we can deliver to our British citizens the things I want them to have – a strong economy, good jobs, a clean environment, safe streets, a secure society.

You see, the sovereignty argument is exactly the opposite of that put forward by the Brexiteers. If we leave the EU, we will not have more control over our own affairs, we will have less. We will be fleeing from the solidarity afforded by working with our friends, in order to make ourselves more prone to global forces – often those manipulated by our enemies. Increased trade barriers and increased inflation on our mountain debt, will mean that we will be paying ten of time more in tariffs on our goods and interest on our borrowing, than the 26 p a day every citizen currently pays to Brussels. And we will be paying it moreover, in interest, to the faceless men of the money markets, and in tariffs to the very EU we have just left –with nothing in return.

For a medium sized nation like Britain, standing alone does not give us more control. It makes us more vulnerable to global forces. It hands the control we enjoy by pooling sovereignty with our friends over to the global forces to which we will be more nakedly exposed.

Pooling sovereignty with our friends does not diminish our sovereignty. It increases it.

We ought not to find this perplexing.

It is after all the basic principle which lies behind our NATO protected peace these last 50 years. In NATO we pooled with our friends, what is arguably our nation's most crucial sovereignty, the sovereignty to defend ourselves. And in doing so we did not give ourselves less security, we gave ourselves more.

Mr Michael Gove made the point perfectly, when, during the Scottish Referendum he asserted "We accept, of course, that Scotland is a nation. We accept, of course, that Scotland has its own sovereignty. But we believe that sovereignty is best exercised when pooled with that of the United Kingdom in Scotland's interest".

I couldn't have put it better myself!

That same principle, let us call it the Michael Gove principle, lies at the heart of the EU. And it is simply put. We are stronger together with our neighbours and will be weaker isolating ourselves from them.

That is the way all our friends see it too. All of Britain's allies - in Europe - in NATO and in the Commonwealth want us to Remain in the EU. And for a very simple reason. Because they know that

the things we fight for together – our security in a turbulent and unpredictable age - our ability to pursue our interests in the face of global challenges, the access to European markets we provide for the Commonwealth, are better achieved, for them and for us, by Great Britain remaining in the EU than by leaving it.

The Brexiteers claim that the EU is somehow a threat to NATO. But the opposite is – once ore – the truth. All our NATO allies know, even if Brexiteers pretend otherwise, that NATO is stronger with a united EU and weaker with a divided one. That's why all our allies in NATO want us to stay in.

## THE US

Since the time of Kissinger and Kennedy, Washington's policy has favoured a twin pillar NATO; a strong United States and a united Europe.

If Great Britain leaves the EU, our influence with our allies in NATO and especially in Washington will be diminished – probably in favour of Germany, which is already being seen by the US as its key partner of choice, if Britain decides to leave the stage.

There is only one person in our neighbourhood who would like to see the EU break up. But he is not our friend. He is the wolf that prowling round our borders, looking for opportunities. For twenties years now President Putin has been trying to drive wedges into the European Union, first through the use of energy and now with tanks, occupying European territory and threatening its smaller nations. Prizing apart the European Union has been one of Putin's cardinal aims, these last two decades and more. So far he has failed. The Brexiteers are about to help him succeed.

So here's the message. Voting Brexit is not what ANY of our friends and Allies want us to do. But it is what Mr Putin would love us too.

Europe's challenges

We who live in Europe, now face four crucial and potentially existential foreign policy challenges in the coming decades. If we can get them all right, Europe and its peoples can be secure and prosperous. If we get any of them wrong, then the decades ahead will be much more dangerous, difficult and painful.

The first of these is to re-calibrate, and where we can, strengthen our western, Atlantic relationship, in an era when the US, in the words of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton pivots its policy towards the Pacific, and away from the Atlantic. Mr Trump of course goes further and wishes to dismantle NATO.

He supports Brexit. Of course he does! He's an isolationist, just like the Brexiteers

Putin, Trump, Johnson, Farage. They all want Brexit. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – but with more hair – apart from Mr Putin perhaps. Who'll join them next I wonder? Kim Jong Un, I shouldn't be surprised.

The serious point is this.

The Atlantic relationship will always remain our most important alliance. But the nature of that alliance is changing in a world where, even with Obama, let alone Trump, some of our interests are beginning to diverge. I wonder if a decade from now, we will still be able to rely on the United States always being prepared to act as our defender of last resort and our friend in all circumstances in the way she has in the past?

I know from my time in Bosnia that the EU is the world's greatest soft power peace builder – and God knows, against the rising tide of global conflict that is needed now more than ever. But soft power is not enough. I am no believer in a European Army. But I do believe that the nations of the EU have to get more serious about hard defence in a troubled age. Here is an area where Great Britain could really take a lead, not only by closer co-operation amongst the generals, but by beginning to integrate the EU's defence industries. This is where procurement costs can be reduced and European battle field effectiveness, increased.

When it comes to dealing with a US that is changing its global stance, the trick will be to recalibrate the Atlantic relationship into something which is on the one hand wider and, on the other, mature enough to accommodate the fact that, though our deeper strategic interests will remain the same, our short term ones in any given situation, may differ. Making this change will require wise diplomacy and a mature understanding of where our interests lie. This cannot be done - or at least will never be taken seriously by Washington, as President Obama made brutally clear - by individual European nations acting alone. It will be best done – probably only done – on an EU basis, within the framework of EU co-operation.

The preservation of the Atlantic axis as a primary means to defend ourselves and pursue our interests in the world, depends on us widening the wavelength of our alliance from one built solely on defence, into one which encompasses, among other things, trade and the economy, too.

This is where TTIP comes in.

Once again, the claim made by the Brexiteers is the opposite of the truth. They point out that Australia has easily negotiated a trade agreement with the US. It's true – but what an agreement!

Because Australia had less clout, they had to accept very disadvantageous terms from the US.

Because the EU is large it can demand much better. You see, OUT means not only being at the back of the queue, it also means weaker bargaining power and less ability to get a deal that's good for us.

## RUSSIA

Our second crucial foreign policy challenge, is of course, to the east.

Whether or not the west – the EU included – made a crucial strategic mistake – as I believe we did – by treating Russia with humiliation and triumphalism after the fall of the Soviet Union, is now a question for historians. What matters now is not what produced the phenomenon of Vladimir Putin, but how to deal with him.

What President Putin asks us to do in Ukraine is something we can never accept. For to do so would require us in Europe to abandon the basic principle on which our peace has been founded these last fifty years. That an EU nation's destiny, whatever its size, depends exclusively on the will of its people and must never again be allowed to fall hostage to the old war-generating notion that the freedom of small nations can be suppressed by a larger neighbour, if they happen to fall within what they consider to be, their "sphere of influence".

Any attempt to change that must be resisted by all the power at our disposal.

In the final analysis, that must mean, if there is no other way, a back stop of NATO tanks, if Putin oversteps the mark.

But this is only half the story.

The fundamental and more immediate problem with Russia does not lie in her strength, but in her weakness.

Her oil revenues were squandered in buying foreign properties rather than investing in domestic capacity. She has a rust bucket industrial base. Her population is declining so fast that her Pacific provinces now increasingly depend on Chinese traders and settlers. Her cohesion is seriously threatened by jihadist movements in the Islamic republics along the Caucasus fault line. And her government and economy are fast sinking into a swamp of kleptocracy.

I do not say this with any relish. I fear a weak and declining Russia far more than a successful and confident one. The continuing collapse of the Russian economy and the weakening of her institutions will only produce more destabilisation and more military adventurism.

This is why, time and patience, rather than tanks and threats are our best instruments in dealing with President Putin. Balance, steadiness, using economic levers, in preference to military ones, neither responding to provocation, nor taking unnecessary steps to provoke, opposing where we must – as in Ukraine – but offering partnerships where we share an interest – as in Syria. Catlreagh and Canning would have understood very well, the need for strategic vision and patience here. Washington, it seems does not. Even under Obama the United States shows every sign of wanting to pursue a more confrontational approach. Europe should do our best to temper this.

## THE MAGHREB AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Our third challenge is of course, our relations with Islam and the Arab world.

Just about the only bright light to shine out of the miserable darkness of the Middle East is the rapprochement with Iran, led it should be remembered, by the European Union, with a Brit, our own Cathy Ashton in charge.

I remain uncertain whether Iran is yet able to fulfil the potential opened up by this agreement. I am broadly optimistic. But what I am clear about is that we should be prepared to take risks to test that possibility. A genuinely reformist Iran could alter the entire balance of the Middle East and open up new possibilities to break the deadlock in a region which has been, for so long – so long - mired in bleak paralysis. A genuinely reformist Iran could also lead the way to a framework, however untidy, to end the war in Syria. And it might - just might - divert the seemingly unstoppable march towards a widening and disastrous Sunni Shia conflict which would affect us all.

The US, for reasons mostly related to Israel may, especially under Trump, be cautious about the new rapprochement with Iran. The EU should be bold in building a new relationship with Iran, which we have helped create.

If Iran is the key to EU policy towards the Middle East, then refugees are the centre piece of what we need to do to re-shape our policies towards the Maghreb and sub Saharan Africa. Here we need to be much more strategic and imaginative. As my colleague Nick Clegg proposed last week, the center piece of this should be a Marshall Plan for the Middle East, and we can only deliver that successfully, through the EU.

## IMMIGRATION

We need to understand however, that, necessary though this is, it will not of itself be sufficient to tackle the EU's greatest current strategic challenge – what to do about refugees.

Some truths, then some thoughts.

First, we need to be blunt and very straightforward about the choice on 23 June.

No free movement, no membership of the EU – or, for that matter of the Free Trade Area either.

With all the dire economic consequences that entails

Second we act as though immigration is a new challenge. It is not. Vast movements of population ahead of war and pestilence and plague have always been with us. Churchill called us the “mongrel nation”, made up as we are of Angles and Saxons and Danes and Vikings and Huguenots and Jews and Ugandan Asians and West Indians and the new wave of migrants from Eastern Europe. And that is what has shaped our national character.

And by the way London is the mongrel city – which is one of the reasons why it is the worlds only successful mega-city.

Migration is not a new fact. It is an age old one.

Mass movement of people is the new normal – the new global strategic challenge of our time. It is not temporary and it is not time limited and, with global warming, it is only going to increase.

I recently visited Kuala Lumpur and spoke with ASEAN leaders already coping with large migrant flows from a rising sea level now engulfing part of the Ganges delta.

This is an issue which cannot be tackled by individual nations acting alone. It can only be tackled globally and regionally.

The United Kingdom cannot duck out of the effects of mass migration, by ducking out of Europe – as we shall discover painfully, directly and on our shores, if we do vote Brexit and Calais with its barbed wire, its police patrols and its squalid inhuman camps, moves to Dover.

Europe will need some proper long-term policies to deal with this. Not short-term deals which subcontract our problem to a neighbour like Turkey in a way which is tawdry, probably illegal and will almost certainly, prove unworkable.

We need proper reception centres on European territory and proper procedures for dealing legally and humanely with those who come to us seeking refuge.

We will either deal with the new global challenge of migration as a European region together, or we will not deal with it. And we will either deal with it using our humanity, or we will be forced to do it with barbed wire and truncheons – and that way comes, not to more peace, but more conflict.

And by the way, given that this is now not just a European challenge, but also a global one, my guess is that it will not be long before we will realise that we need some new global architecture for coping with migration. And if the EU was wise, we should be pushing for that too.

Here are some fundamental facts about immigration, which we have so far shied away from saying in this debate.

There is no wave of immigration into this country that we have not benefitted from economically and culturally.

Second, immigrants are not taking jobs. How could they be – when we have full employment.

Third there is absolutely no evidence either that they have depressed wages.

Last, it is an act of gross irresponsibility to fan the flames of prejudice against immigrants in order to win votes. Those who do so should be called out and condemned, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has recently done.

Some claim say that immigration has become unsustainable. In fact it is our ageing economic model that has become unsustainable – we do not have sufficient numbers of people of working, tax-paying age to sustain our public services. That - not immigrant queues – is the chief reason behind the strains on our public services. We need immigration to keep our economy vibrant and our tax coffers full enough to pay for the public services of an ageing population.

## CONCLUSION

Bosnia story.....

We face now what is arguably the most unpredictable, violent and conflict-ridden period of recent times.

Do we in Europe not realise how much the terms of our prosperity and security have changed these last 20 years?

We now have a United States - even under Obama and Clinton, let alone Trump - looking west across the Pacific, quite as much as east across the Atlantic – the US which may not wish to act forever as our defender of last resort and friend in all circumstances.

And on our eastern borders we have the most assertive – even aggressive – Russian President of our times, threatening European territory with tanks.

And to our southeast, an Arab world in flames.

And to our south the Maghreb in turmoil, right deep down into Africa.

And all around us economic power growing larger than any single European nation.

In the face of these challenges and at such a dangerous and turbulent time, to abandon our solidarity with our European neighbours in pursuit of the illusory sovereignty of the cork bobbing around behind other people's ocean liners – that would be an act of staggering and historic foolishness for which our children and our grandchildren would pay.