

The Treaties of Rome, 60 years on.

Where do the European Union and the United Kingdom go from here?

by Brendan Simms¹

Contemplating the utter chaos in Europe, and the question of where we go now, one is tempted to respond like the apocryphal Irishman who has been asked for directions. “If I were you”, he replied, “I wouldn’t start from here”. As the European Union faces a continuing currency crisis, Russian territorial ambitions, the prospect of a renewed surge of migrants caused by Turkish manipulation, and the possibility of a victory for the National Front in the French elections, it would be hard to imagine a less auspicious moment to answer the question posed by this timely edition of the journal.

Europe is not short of ideas on how to proceed, taking up the Istituto Affari Internazionali’s injunction of “The responsibility to propose”.² The think-tank *United Europe* has brought forward its own *Rome Manifesto*, calling for the political unification of the continent. The author’s own outfit, *Project for Democratic Union*, has been advocating something similar for some time. *Sven Biscop*, of the Belgian Egmont Institute, calls on Europe to embrace ‘permanent structured cooperation’ (PESCO) at least on defense.³ And the President of the European Commission, *Jean-Claude Juncker*, has produced a White Paper setting out no fewer than five ways forward, ranging from retrenchment to ever closer union.⁴

What is striking about *Juncker’s* agenda, though, is that it makes no mention at all of the greatest threat facing the European Union: the forthcoming Brexit negotiations, which must now follow the triggering of the fabled Article 50 by the Prime Minister, *Theresa May*, who was conspicuous in Rome by her absence. If the EU gets this wrong, and there is very little in the past decade to suggest that it

1 I would like to thank *Chris Powers* for his help in preparing and revising this article.

2 *Vai, L.*: EU60. Refounding Europe. The responsibility to propose, in: IAI, 17/6 (2017).

3 *Biscop, S.*: Oratio pro PESCO, in: Egmont Papers, 1 (2017).

4 *European Commission*: White paper on the future of Europe. Reflections and scenarios for the EU 27, Brussels, 2017.

will get the separation right, then the departure of Britain could finally tear the union asunder.

I.

The challenges facing the United Kingdom over the next two years are numerous and increasing by the day: how to negotiate with Europe after the triggering of Article 50; how to manage trade access after leaving the Single Market and Customs Union; how to deal with the rights of EU residents in Britain; how to sort out the Irish border; how to maintain the integrity of the United Kingdom; how to keep parliament and the devolved administrations involved without allowing them to derail the process; how to determine Britain's 'Brexit bill'⁵; and how to manage EU-UK political-strategic relations after Brexit. The list is far from exhaustive. All of these issues are hugely important, and they are closely interconnected, but at root they are all a question of *order*, not so much of the 'rules-based' global international community, significant though that is, but of the European order around which the world system was originally constructed and which remains – for the United Kingdom at least – its primary pivot.⁶

To most Eurozoners – and many British *Remainers* – the UK decision to withdraw from the European Union, the principal political ordering mechanism of our continent, was a tragic act of self-indulgence, or even of self-harm,⁷ based on a risible over-estimation of its current significance and bargaining power.⁸ In this narrative, particular emphasis is placed upon the role of England, and the English, who are quixotically defying the march of history. The respected Irish commentator *Fintan O'Toole* currently summed up this sentiment when he wrote that "The English are no longer dominant and powerful. They are a mid-sized fairly average western European nation". *O'Toole* dismisses the Prime Minister's threats as "hilarious" suggestions that if Europe "does not play nice, she and *Boris* will destroy its economic artillery with their flashing sabers". On this basis, he characterizes Brexit as "imperial England's last stand", in the tradition of British "heroic failure" from the charge of the Light Brigade, Isandhlwana, the Somme and Dunkirk.⁹

5 *Barker, A.*: The €60 billion Brexit bill. How to disentangle Britain from the EU budget, in: Centre for European Reform, 2 (2017).

6 The following paragraphs are based on *Simms, B.*: A world unbalanced, in: New Statesman, 01.12.2016, 31-34, and *Simms, B.*: The world after Brexit, in: New Statesman, 01.03.2017, 27-31.

7 Thus "Hard Brexit is an epic act of self-harm- only reinforcing rancour and division", in: Editorial of The Observer, 26.03.2017, 38.

8 E. g. *Tilford, S.*: Brexit Britain. The poor man of Western Europe, in: Centre for European Reform, 9 (2016).

9 *O'Toole, F.*: Brexit resurrects the English cult of heroic failure, in: The Irish Times, 24.01.2017.

In the same spirit, the distinguished Cambridge Goethe scholar *Nicholas Boyle* recently located Brexit in “a specifically English psychosis, the narcissistic outcome of a specifically English crisis of identity”. The first phase of this process, he argues, lays in the unions with Scotland and Ireland when the “English gave up their Englishness in order to become British”. The second phase, *Boyle* suggests, has been the last fifty years or so, when the English lost even that surrogate for identity and have been wandering through the imperial debris that litters their homeland ever since, “unable to say who they are”. This explains, he continues, “the trauma of lost exceptionalism”, the English refusal to “become just another nation like everybody else (...) neither especially honourable nor specially dishonourable, with limited weight, limited resources, and limited importance in the world”, and to learn “to live in the world on an equal footing with other people”. Instead, the English cling to “Britain” as a “figment (...) to disguise their oppressive, indeed colonial, relations to the other nations inhabiting Great Britain and Ireland”, a “self-deceptive device by the English to deny the Scots and the Irish a will of their own”. For this reason, *Boyle* concludes, the English resist not so much “the goal of a ‘super state’”, which exists only in their “fearful imagination” but the “idea of collaborating with equals”. The English Brexiteers, in short, are the “lager louts of Europe” who have engaged in “an act of geopolitical vandalism”.¹⁰

These sentiments are echoed in continental Europe, sometimes equally trenchantly, and sometimes in a more measured fashion. There the emphasis is on the “rules” of the European “club”, whose membership cooperates on the basis of equality, and will not accept any “cherry-picking”, such as British attempts to maintain access to the Single Market without paying the “dues”, including the unrestricted free movement of people Brexit was designed to prevent. This theme was reprised by *Joseph Muscat*, the Prime Minister of Malta, which now holds the rotating presidency of the European Council, and as such will be closely involved in the Brexit negotiations. He explicitly compared the EU to a “sports club”, from which the UK might expect some small favours after Brexit but no more. “You can aspire maybe to park your car in their parking if there is a free space”, he explains, “You can aspire to get into the gym at some times”, but that would be it.¹¹ *Juncker* even predicted, in a thinly-disguised threat, that “Britain’s example will make everyone realise that it is not worth leaving”.¹²

10 *Boyle, N.*: The problem with the English: England doesn’t want to be just another member of a team, in: *The New European*, 17.01.2017.

11 Quoted in *Helm, T.*: EU chief warns Britain to expect a painful exit deal, *The Observer*, 29.01.2017, 11.

12 Quoted in *N. A.*: Starter’s orders. As trigger is pulled on Brexit talks, Juncker takes aim at Britain, in: *Metro*, 21.03.2017, 5.

On these readings, the future of Britain is grim, “adrift and irrelevant” as some would have it, helplessly exposed to the chill winds of economic globalisation, and friendless abroad. Even the integrity of the United Kingdom is in doubt, as the Scots and even the Northern Irish shape up to assert their right to independence within Europe after Brexit. Sometimes, this is anticipated with satisfaction, as the just desserts for English vandalism. Usually, it is contemplated with fear and regret, for example in the *New Statesman*, when it argued that “A new constitutional settlement and the creation of a fully federal state are necessary if the UK is to survive”.¹³ Among the academic community the decision was widely received with consternation accompanied by a headshaking belief that Britain had cut itself off from a better European future.¹⁴

All of these analyses contain important truths and insights. The chaotic scenes in the Conservative and Labour parties, widespread expressions of “Bregret”, confusion about what the future relationship between the EU and UK will or should be, discussion of a second referendum or a “Brexit election”, all give the impression that the vote was somehow an accident, a “Brexident”, as some have termed it. There was a strong element of contingency to the outcome. When he overconfidently promised the referendum, *Mr. Cameron* did not foresee that *Boris Johnson* would oppose him or that he would lose it. He could not have foreseen that a new Labour leader, in the shape of *Mr. Corbyn*, would fail to mobilise the left-wing vote, probably intentionally. The result was also determined by the unexpectedly brutal nature of the campaign, with wild claims on both sides, though those of some leavers were by far the most egregious.

It is also true that Brexit has re-opened the Scottish Question, as the 2014 referendum on independence may have been held after the intention to hold a vote on membership of the European Union had been announced, but the vast majority of those casting their ballots did so on the assumption that Britain would remain. *Nicola Sturgeon*’s demand that the issue is revisited with another referendum in thus perfectly justified.¹⁵ It is equally correct that Brexit will mix the cards in Northern Ireland in ways that are deeply unhelpful to the peace process there, which rests partly on the involvement of the EU, and which would be damaged by any restrictions on free travel across the border. Finally, it is right to warn of the economic consequences once Brexit is finally carried out. To be sure, these are currently far less dire than “project fear” warned, but the present economic

13 Quoted in *N. A.*: Leader: Brexit, Ireland, Scotland, and the Union, in: *New Statesman*, 26.01.2017.

14 See for example the contributions in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte: Brexit*, 49-50, 2016.

15 *Sturgeon, N.*: If not now, when?, in: *New European*, 24.03.2017, 7.

“phoney war” will surely end once Britain leaves the single market with serious short to medium term consequences for the City, manufacturers and other areas of the economy.¹⁶ Because the European Union is a political project – just like Brexit – we should not assume as the prominent Brexiteer *Daniel Hannan* did recently, that Brussels or the national capitals will follow a purely economic logic.¹⁷

Unfortunately, these analyses also rest on a flawed understanding of the European order, and Britain’s place in it, which make them unreliable guides to what lies ahead. In order to understand why this is so, we first have to remind ourselves of the historical and political foundations of the system we now inhabit. The continental order is largely a product of British, and latterly Anglo-American, attempts to create a balance of power which prevented the emergence of a hostile hegemon, first Spain, then France and then Germany, while being at the same time robust enough to ward off external predators, first the Turks, then Russia and then the Soviet Union. The resulting “Goldilocks’ problem”, in which the continentals were either too strong or too weak, has been one of the central themes of European history of the past half millennium. After the Second World War, the Americans, some visionary continentals, and even some Britons (such as *Winston Churchill*) realised that the only way to cook a porridge at exactly the right temperature was to establish a full democratic political union, with or without the United Kingdom. Such a United States of Europe could look after itself without endangering its neighbours, and both embed and mobilise Germany for the common good. For various reasons, most of them to do with the incompetence and divisions of the continental Europeans, full union was never achieved, and while it remains the only answer to the European question its realisation seems further away today than ever.

II.

The relationship between Britain and Europe can be summed up in two simple geopolitical propositions. First, that the European Union was designed to deal with the German Problem and the European Question, or if one prefers the German Question and the European Problem, for they are two sides of the same coin. Secondly, the European Union was not designed to deal with the British Problem. Nobody claimed after 1945 that the United Kingdom had been such a

16 For a good analysis of this see *Tilford, S.*: Britain’s economy: enjoy the calm before the storm, in: Centre for European Reform Bulletin, 112 (2017).

17 *Hannan, D.*: We will get a good deal – because rational self-interest will overcome the Eurocrats’ fury, in: Conservative Home, 08.12.2016.

danger to European peace that it required a supra-national structure to embed and contain it. Nor did anyone argue that the United Kingdom, unlike most of the rest of continental Europe, had been so weak in the face of a threat from others that it needed the protection of a supra-national body.¹⁸

Britain and mainland Europe have thus been on quite separate paths for a long time. The central geopolitical fact on the continent was German power or potential power: demographic, economic and military. In the period before German unification this led to a system of conditional sovereignty in central Europe, designed to prevent another state – usually France – from using its resources to achieve hegemony, and to stop the Germans from developing such ambitions for themselves. It was based on the diffusion, not concentration of power. Things changed after German unification in 1871, which eventually unbalanced the entire European and global system. With difficulty, Germany was subdued and a system of conditional sovereignty was re-imposed on central Europe, the difference being that this time it was to be extended to the entire western half of the continent, which was also in mortal peril from Soviet communism.¹⁹

The European integration project was thus a project of “dual containment”, designed to “embed” Germany and deter *Stalin*. It was also a strategy of “dual mobilisation”, in that it sought to draw not only on the energies of the western Europeans but also the Germans to fight communism, and certainly to stop fighting each other. This supranational project was strongly supported by the Americans and by parts of the British establishment, including *Winston Churchill*, who famously called in September 1946, for the creation of a kind of “United States of Europe”, with the British Empire not a member but closely “associated”. The vision of a complete political union has not been realised, but the European Union has embarked on important supra-national projects such as the Euro, the Schengen travel area and the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In Britain, things developed very differently. Europe was at all times critically important. The question of England’s relationship to the continent dominated policy and politics for hundreds of years from the fall of France in the fifteenth century through to the Westminster crisis in both major parties today, which is primarily the product of disagreements over Europe. The main strategic and ideological threats have come from Europe. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was the threat to Protestantism and parliamentary liberties from

18 See *Simms, B.*: Britain’s Europe. A thousand years of conflict and cooperation, London, 2016.

19 See generally *Simms, B.*: Europe, the struggle for supremacy, 1453 to the present, London, 2013.

Philip II and *Louis XIV's* absolutism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism. In the nineteenth century, there was the challenge of *Napoleon*, followed by the confrontation between British liberalism and Tsarist autocracy. In the twentieth century, Britain saw off Germany in the First World War, resisted Nazism in the Second World War, and made a substantial contribution to deterring the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Like many European states, Britain responded to these challenges by pursuing a policy of maintaining the “balance of power” on the continent, through alliances and the payment of subsidies, to ensure that no single actor would be able to threaten her security. In constitutional terms, however, the British response to the European problem was very different. Faced with the danger from *Louis XIV* during the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the longstanding enmity between England and Scotland threatened to undermine the war effort against a common foe, the two countries entered into a complete political union in 1707. The state debts were merged, there would henceforth be only one army and foreign policy and the new polity would be anchored in a common parliamentary representation at Westminster. This link between debt, defence and what then passed for democracy, proved to be so powerful that it served as the basis for the American Union in the late eighteenth century.

On the continent, in short, Europe was the problem and the European Union was the answer. In Britain, Europe was also the problem, but the United Kingdom was the answer. For this reason, the British have never seen the need to sacrifice their sovereignty in a supra-national project. They have therefore cooperated with Europe on a largely inter-governmental basis, and not on a supranational one.

That said, the European order – understood as the totality of economic, political and military relationships – that developed after 1945 was primarily an Anglo-American order. It was built on the allied victory during the war, which enabled the re-establishment of democracy on the continent. It depended entirely on the protective carapace provided by NATO, in which the UK was the second most important actor after the Americans, and by far the most powerful European one. Since 1973, the United Kingdom has been part of the European integration project, and while the relationship has often been turbulent, the British contribution there has been substantial. London was the principal sponsor of the Single Market and the eastward enlargement of the EU.²⁰

20 Smith, J.: *The UK's journeys into and out of the EU: Destinations Unknown*, Oxford, 2017.

To be sure, the United Kingdom stayed aloof from the key European projects: the Euro, Schengen and any planned European army. It did so on two very cogent grounds. First, because involvement would have been incompatible with the independence of the United Kingdom, hard won over history with blood and treasure. Here the conditional sovereignty of continental Europe clashed with the absolute sovereignty of the Westminster parliament. Secondly, because the British government believed quite rightly that these federal projects required a political union. It was not, however, opposed to such an arrangement on the continent. It is true that London has long tried to keep the political bonds in Europe loose enough to enable continued UK membership without losing her sovereignty. But more recently, in an abandonment of the long-held principle of the balance of power, the former Chancellor *Osborne*, recognising the need to keep the Eurozone stable, constantly pressed for closer fiscal and political integration there.²¹

This gives the lie to the idea that Britain has been blocking progress in Europe. This is a firmly entrenched view in Brussels, expressed vehemently by the President of the Commission, *Mr. Juncker*. It has also been hilariously expressed in the iconic 1980s TV series “Yes Minister”, when *Sir Humphrey* tells the minister that Britain has only joined the European Union to make a “pig’s breakfast of it from the inside”. The sad truth is that the European Union does not need UK help to do this. The Europeans have shown in the Euro Crisis, which has nothing to do with London, and in many other disasters, that they are quite capable of making a pig’s breakfast for themselves, entirely unaided.

The problem, in other words, is not the United Kingdom, but the long-term weakness of continental Europe, which Brexit has brought home in the most painful way, and aggravated. It was triggered not by the project of European integration, as such, but by Europe’s manifest disunity and incompetence as expressed in the Euro and migration crises. Without those fiascos there would never have been a majority “leave” vote, although there would probably have been a separation further down the line. The peoples of Europe sense this and so do the elites. They all know that whereas Grexit would be a judgment on Greece, Brexit was a judgment on the European Union.

Unfortunately, the hope that the shock of Brexit will provoke profound and radical reform in the EU is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of national governments represented in the European Council and the Brussels elites. They need help, but like alcoholics they also need to realise the utter wretchedness of

21 Quoted in *Stevenson, A.*: Osborne backs more Eurozone integration, in: *Politics.co.uk*, 11.08.2011.

their condition before they ask for it. Continental Europe, unfortunately, has much further to fall, before it can rise again. At the moment, it is still in denial.

I have already set out the only answer to the travails of the continent in these pages, which is full political union, so I shall not repeat it in detail here.²² This could be an asymmetric union of “core Europe”, in which Germany took on the role played by England in the United Kingdom. Alternatively, it could be a more symmetric larger Union of the entire Eurozone on American lines. Only by linking debt, defence and democracy as pioneered, there will Europe be able to stabilise the currency, deter Russia, and address the democratic deficit against which electorates are rebelling. The alternative is either continued chaos, or a return to the nation state and the untethering of Germany from the continental order.

III.

Whatever the solution in mainland Europe, the future attitude of the UK to the European Union will determine the survival of the project, after Brexit more than ever before. We know what the extreme Brexiteers think. They believe that wars are not won by evacuations. *Mr. Farage*, for example, has a particular view not only of Britain, but also of Europe, which he believes should be a continent of sovereign nation states. This is partly because he is convinced that even a Brexit-ed Britain will only be safe in a Europe in which the EU itself has disintegrated. It is also because *Mr. Farage* loves Europeans in his own way. He genuinely believes that the EU has been a malign force on the continent. This is why he has signalled his intention to take his roadshow to the continent, to France, the Netherlands and elsewhere. “The EU is failing, the EU is dying”, he says, “I hope we have got the first brick out of the wall”.²³ So the battle in Britain may be over, but the battle for Europe is just about to begin.

In recent months, the once sulphurous *Boris Johnson* has been more conciliatory, even saying that the EU “was a noble idea for its time”, and during his remarks to the Munich Security conference in February 2017, the Foreign Secretary expressed the hope that the United Kingdom might support the European Union like a flying buttress, from the outside.²⁴ Since the result, *Michael Gove* has spoken of his hope that “we can build a new, stronger, more positive relationship

22 Simms, B.: Scotland, the British question and the European problem: A Churchillian solution, in: ZSE, 12/4 (2014), 456–483; and Simms, B./Zeeb, B.: Europa am Abgrund. Plädoyer für die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa, München, 2016, 140.

23 Quote in N. A.: Nigel Farage’s Brexit victory speech in full, in: Daily Mirror, 24.06.2016.

24 Johnson, B.: Beyond Brexit: A Global Britain, Speech, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 02.12.2016.

with our European neighbours, based on free trade and friendly cooperation”. He has also, however, expressed desire that Brexit would spark a “democratic liberation” of the continent. *Mr. Gove* now needs to explain what that means. If he has a *Farage*-style return to the national states and currencies in mind, then the EU will resist him tooth and nail, and rightly so, as the European Project is still the continent’s last best hope on earth. If, however, he means the establishment of a full parliamentary union of the Eurozone, to provide democratic legitimation for its decisions, then he is pointing the way out of the crisis.

For the separation to be managed amicably, there must be clarity about the nature of the existing relationship. Here the two prevailing models of “divorce” and a “club” are both problematic, but also highly revealing about the misconceptions in mainland Europe and even among some “remainers”. The United Kingdom is not divorcing the EU, because it was never married in the first place. The nations of the United Kingdom are married to each other and nobody else. More worryingly, the Eurozone itself is not married in any meaningful sense of the word, as it is not linked through a political union. The rhetoric of divorce suggests that Brussels does not realise this, although the markets know it and the populations feel it. At the very most, the Europeans are involved in a long-term form of cohabitation in which there is confusion about which rights have now accrued to whom.

The rhetoric of the “club” is even more mistaken. The United Kingdom has “left the club”, they say, and consequently cannot expect to “use its facilities”. There must, so the argument runs, be “no cherry-picking”, by which Britain secures access to the single market but does not have to guarantee freedom of movement. This, the German finance minister *Mr. Schäuble* warns, would encourage “imitators” demanding the same terms. Unfortunately, this analogy shows a complete misunderstanding of the historical roots and geopolitical realities of the current European order. Article 50 does not really apply to Britain. The United Kingdom is not an ordinary member of a club called the European Union. It is the principal European shareholder in the Anglo-American consortium which owns the freehold of the property on which the club has been built. It is also Europe’s main contributor to the defence contractor (NATO) which has long provided the doorman who ensures the security of the club.

In fact, the freeholder may have some serious questions for the club. The onsite security the club has attempted to provide itself (Schengen external border) is not working very well. All kinds of non-club members from some rough parts of town have been spotted on the premises, and have been trying to break into neighbouring houses (via Calais). The freeholder may also express some serious

concerns about the long-term sustainability of the club, whose ructions are destabilising his own residence, generally kept in good order, which is located just beside the club in the same terrace. Finally, the freeholder will remind the club that most of its members are not paying their relatively modest security dues of 2 % (to NATO). Some, such as Ireland and Cyprus, are neither members or NATO, nor make any meaningful contribution to their own defence; they are simply “free-riders”. Britain will no doubt remind the club that they cannot “cherry-pick”, that is expect the leaseholder to do the dirty work of protection, while refusing to let him share in the economic benefits they enjoy under that protection.

In short, the United Kingdom played and plays a unique role within the system; it is not in any meaningful sense “equal” to the other states of the “club” it is leaving. Over the past three hundred and fifty years, from the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, through the eighteenth century European balance of power, the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, the Versailles Treaty of 1919 and the 1945 settlement, Britain has been central to the European order, far more than any other power over time. This remains true today, because the European Union depends almost entirely upon the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, of which Britain is the dominant European member, for its security. The EU may be a club, and it can make whatever rules it likes, but it should never forget that the Anglo-Americans own the freehold of the property upon which the club is built. Brussels and the continental capitals are at best leaseholders, and in many cases just tenants of this order. Put another way, the United Kingdom is not just another European “space” to be ordered, but one of the principal ordering powers of the continent.

IV.

Against this background, the big geopolitical question will be whether the UK and the EU, former partners hopeful of separating amicably, eventually become enemies. Right now, the two sides are at the ready but not in combat. A great deal will depend on who fires first, or is perceived to have done so. In this heated atmosphere even a political sneeze could set off a massacre.

It goes without saying that both sides will lose from a confrontation. Critical to avoiding that is an understanding of the actual balance of forces. These are much less unfavourable to the UK than Brussels hawks and many British pessimists imagine. The immediate post-referendum claim by the Dutch PM *Mark Rutte*, who then held the presidency of the European Council, that “England has col-

lapsed, politically, monetarily, constitutionally and economically” was wide of the mark.²⁵ It is true that London is dwarfed by the economic might of the Eurozone and the rest of the EU, and that it faces a period of considerable short to medium term economic pressure. It is also true that the UK faces serious threats to its coherence in Scotland and, to a certain extent, in Northern Ireland. That said, a powerful single actor, the United Kingdom, will be facing a fatally divided coalition, which is already showing cracks not merely between the Commission and the European Council, but within the Council itself. Moreover, once started, the struggle will be won not by those who can inflict the most, but by those who can endure the most. The United Kingdom has repeatedly demonstrated a capacity to defend her sovereignty against all comers. Her political fundamentals are strong. Mainland Europe, by contrast, has repeatedly demonstrated its propensity to fragment. Its political fundamentals are weak (sadly).

The threat to the unity of the United Kingdom is greatly exaggerated. Wales remains fully committed, and voted “leave” by a similar margin. In Northern Ireland the divisions are principally between the two communities, and only in the second instance between one of those communities and the British state. The role of the London government in containing tensions there remains unchanged, and while there was a clear majority for “remain” in the EU in the province, there is an equally clear and over-riding desire to remain part of the United Kingdom. What will change is the status of the border. The blame game here will be complex, but it is far from certain that all of the opprobrium will land at London’s door. *Mrs. May* has made clear that whatever the position on goods, the free movement of people under the Common Travel Area, which long predates both countries’ membership of the European Union, should continue. Dublin would dearly welcome such a solution. The problem is not London, but Brussels. EU rules state clearly that any member with a land border with a non-member state which is not a member of the Schengen area, and that is what the United Kingdom will be after Brexit, is obliged to have border controls. It would not be Britain, but the Europeans who were dividing Ireland. To submit to such a demand from Brussels would be as politically impossible for the Irish Republic as it would be difficult for her to resist the economic reprisals which may result from failing to do so. Once again – the last time being during the financial crisis – Dublin is discovering that it risks becoming an object buffeted by broader

25 Quoted in *Baczynska, G./Piper, E.*: At last EU summit, Cameron voices regret for Brexit, in: Reuters, 29.06.2016 – Albeit in the context of giving UK some breathing space before it triggered Art. 50.

European forces it is unable to control. From the purely economic point of view in fact, it would make more sense for the Irish Republic to follow the United Kingdom out of the EU, just as it followed her into it.²⁶

The simple truth is that Europe will struggle to devise a punishment for the United Kingdom which will not crucify Ireland first. This is well understood in Dublin, which is why the Irish Taoiseach *Enda Kenny* has been active in trying to mitigate the effects of the British departure in Brussels. It is also understood in Berlin, which is why Chancellor *Merkel* informally refers to the Irish leader as “Mr. Brexit”. Unless the EU compromises here, Dublin will refuse to comply, and if it does compromise, it is hard to see how Brussels could effectively police a tariff barrier if London goes for de facto free trade with Ireland. Ireland is now Britain’s greatest friend in Europe. The result may be that whatever the feats of Irish arms in the British uniform in years past, the greatest services the Irish do for the United Kingdom may lie ahead.

It is true that in Scotland Brexit has created a material change of circumstance entitling the SNP government to demand a fresh referendum. That said, independence only ever made sense in the benign European environment before the 2008 crash and the onset of the migration crisis and the Russian threat. Then the Irish Tiger economy served as a model. Since the Euro crisis this is no longer the case. Even as late as the failed 2014 referendum, there would still have been EU members on both sides of the border. Now all is utterly changed. If it left the UK now, Scotland would immediately have a “hard” border with England, the country with which it does the vast majority of its trade. It is currently a net beneficiary of the union economically; it would lose that money with independence, but as a rich state within the rest of the EU it would be required to contribute more to Brussels. The oil price is low. A Scottish vote for independence would therefore be a much greater risk than Brexit poses for England, and indeed, Scotland. Given that Scotland joined the United Kingdom in order to guard against European dangers, how likely is she to throw in her lot with a European Union in possibly terminal crisis by leaving the most successful Union project Europe has known so far, the United Kingdom?

It is worth remembering here, relations between the four nations of the United Kingdom have been largely determined by considerations of European order. Wales and Ireland were reduced so as to secure their resources and deny the

26 Thus *Coughlan, A.*: Why Brexit should be followed by Irexit, London, 2017. He greatly underestimates, however, the political reason for staying.

enemy a “back door” to England. She combined with Scotland in 1707 for much the same reasons. With conquest and union went representation. Some of the oldest constituencies in the British parliament are Welsh, the Scots sent MPs to Westminster, as did the Irish after the Act of Union in 1801, including Catholics not long after. This arrangement had its faults, of course, but it kept the lid on tensions within the nations, particularly in Ireland, and between the nations, and it enabled the smaller peoples to be represented at the heart of government, where “independence” meant both dominance by England, in any case, and exposure to both foreign subversion and English fear of it. Geopolitically, therefore, English or British sovereignty is meaningful in a way that that of the Irish Republic is not, and that of an independent Scotland or Wales would not be. Politically, to be sure, the outcome of Brexit will put considerable pressure on the relations between the nations of the United Kingdom, but in the long term, as the intermediary role of the European Union recedes, the bonds may well strengthen.

The nations of the United Kingdom, and especially the English, thus already have their union, which has survived the test of time. Unlike the continental Europeans, who are either too big to be allowed to have national sovereignty (the Germans) or too weak for it to be meaningful (almost everybody else), the English have a “Goldilocks” constitutional and geopolitical body shape. Small enough to be distinct and large enough to survive, they see no need to submerge their sovereignty in a still larger union. To them the unrestricted free movement of people, which – if managed properly – elevates continental Europeans and knocks the edges off their more malign nationalisms, is unnecessary and potentially subversive of their own identity. In this the English resemble the nineteenth-century Sicilians in “The Leopard” of whom *Giuseppe di Lampedusa*’s Prince of Salina said, and he was not being ironic, that they were already perfect and did not need to be improved.

Whether all this is still true today is, of course, something to be tested. Many Europeans, and the more pessimistic “remainers”, believe that the post-imperial United Kingdom is too weak to survive outside of the European Union, and will probably fragment as a result of Brexit. This is almost certainly untrue. The power of the United Kingdom ultimately rests on the strength of England, enhanced by the support of the Scots, Welsh, and (Northern) Irish. England was a major power in Europe long before the overseas empire, and the United Kingdom remains one in military, economic and cultural terms today. Her economy is more than twice the size of Russia’s, for example, and unlike Germany or Japan she possesses atomic weaponry and (pace some technical issues!) the capacity to

deliver them. To call the United Kingdom or even England a “mid-sized fairly average western European nation” therefore seems very wide of the mark. It is a mistake many have made over the years, invariably to their own cost.

Moreover, the key variable is not British power, but the weakness of Europe. Even before 2016, the European order was in serious and largely self-generated crisis, as a result of the EU’s inability to get a grip on the common defence through deterring Russia, of defending the external border against illegal mass migration or redistributing those who had been admitted, and of sorting out the Euro crisis once and for all. First it was upended by Brexit in June, and then it was further shattered by the election of *Donald Trump* in November 2016. The result of this, in geopolitical terms, will be the opposite of what the pessimists predicted for Britain. Here the crucial factor is not *Mr. Trump*’s exuberant enthusiasm for Britain, and for Brexit,²⁷ but his undying contempt for the European Union and most of its leaders, most recently expressed in the link he made between the trade imbalances between the US and the EU and Europe’s failure to do more for its own defence.²⁸

The new President’s election rallies often featured banners accusing *Hillary Clinton* of wanting to start “World War III”. These referred to her willingness to honour US commitments under the collective defence provisions of article 5 of the NATO charter. *Mr. Trump*, by contrast, has repeatedly questioned whether America should defend allies who are not spending enough on their own protection. He even referred to NATO as “obsolete”. More worryingly, there has been a general whiff of pro-Russianism in the *Trump* camp. The President has made no secret of his personal admiration for *Vladimir Putin*, the man who has annexed Crimea, unleashed a proxy war in eastern Ukraine, and threatens NATO’s eastern flank, to say nothing of his other crimes. One of *Trump*’s main backers, *Newt Gingrich*, recently described Estonia as a mere “suburb” of St. Petersburg. The close Russian connections of many others in *Mr. Trump*’s penumbra are too numerous and too well known to require repetition here. The frightening truth is that with regard to Russia there is a lot more going in the *Trump* camp than just – entirely understandable – irritation with European free-riding.²⁹

27 See *Trump* interview with *Gove, M.*: Brexit will be a great thing, in: *The Times*, 16.01.2017, 6-7; also the headline: I’ll do a deal with Britain, in: *The Times*, 16.01.2017, 1.

28 Headline: *Trump*: Berlin soll NATO-Schulden zahlen, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 19.03.2017, 1. See also *Charter, D./Blakely, R.*: Merkel faces Trump showdown on NATO and Germany’s exports, in: *The Times*, 13.03.2017; *N.A.*: Germany dismisses White House’s “intimidating” \$300bn bill for defence, in: *The Sunday Times*, 26.03.2017, 17.

29 *Simms, B./Laderman, C.*: *Donald Trump. The making of a world view*, London, 2017, 108.

Mr. Trump also poses another more insidious but no less fatal menace to Europe. His election has blown wind into the sails of the European far right. “Their world is falling apart”, *Florian Philippot* of the Front National exulted after the result, “Ours is being built”.³⁰ This year, the National Front is as likely to win the French Presidential election as Brexit and a *Trump* Victory seemed last year. *Mr. Trump’s* contempt for the European project is evident from his tipped choice of US ambassador to the EU, *Ted Malloch*.³¹ It was reiterated most recently during *Mrs. May’s* visit to the US, and further evidenced by his exemption of Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia from his arbitrary and unjust immigration ban. This defied all rationality – as the threat from British-born Islamists is considerable – but gave the President another opportunity to show disrespect to mainland Europe. The contrast with the Obama administration and indeed with the entire thrust of post-war US policy, which has broadly welcomed European integration and underpinned the security of the continent, could not be greater.

All this means that the capacity of the rump European Union to deal with the security, economic and migration challenges ahead will be severely tested. The weakness of mainland Europe is manifest also at the national level. Even its two most important countries, France and Germany, have ceased to exist as separate states in vital areas: neither controls its own currency or borders, and Germany does not even have a nuclear deterrent or (sufficiently credible) conventional capability. This means that, despite the hopes of many,³² *Angela Merkel* will be too weak to lead Europe even if she wins her election this year. To be sure, she has pledged to work together with the new President only if he respects people regardless of creed, sexual orientation, and skin colour (even if it is orange). *Mrs. Merkel* lacks the instruments to protect Europe militarily, however, because of Germany’s largely pacifist political culture and the failure of the EU to provide itself with anything more than a shadow capability at supra-national level. She is also losing ground steadily at home. A *Trump*-induced fresh wave of Syrian refugees may well finish her off.

In democratic Europe, therefore, only the United Kingdom stands out. Here the widespread tendency of continental Europeans and the largely “remain” academic community in the United Kingdom to equate Brexit with *Trump* misses the

30 Quoted in *Waterfield, B.*: European populists exultant at Trump’s ‘revolution’, in: *The Times*, 09.11.2016.

31 *N. A.*: Trump’s tipped EU ambassador is “malevolent” say European leaders, in: *BBC News*, 03.02.2017.

32 E. g. *White, M.*: Low-key Merkel quietly takes over the mantle of leader of the liberal west, in: *The New European*, 24.03.2017, 10-11. For a clear-eyes view of the weakness of Germany post-US elections see *Kundnani, H.*: Trump and the new parameters of German foreign policy, in: *Aspen Review*, 1 (2017), 53-57.

point. Despite all the Brexit turmoil, Britain is likely to remain infertile soil for extremism, at least once the separation from the European Union has been completed. While many of those who voted for Brexit did so for similar reasons as the workers who opted for *Trump*, the political mainstream, including those who supported leaving the EU, remains strongly in favour of free trade, and strongly committed to NATO.³³ Moreover, the United Kingdom is still the world's fifth-largest economy, a nuclear power, and retains the principal characteristics of sovereign statehood, her own currency, parliament and control over her borders. The result of all this will be a fundamental shift in Europe. Britain will now be one of the remaining large economies in favour of free trade.³⁴ More important still is the fact that with a large question-mark now hanging over NATO, the contribution made by the British armed forces to the defence of Europe as a whole, and the defence of European values against *Mr. Putin*, takes on a completely new significance. One way or the other, as the United States radically reduces its stake in the European order – at least for four or even eight years – that of the other and previously junior principal shareholder, namely the United Kingdom, increases. Those are the laws of geopolitics.

Here *Mr. Muscat's* remarks and the history of his native land illustrate the nature of the European order in times past, the problems facing it today, and the contrast between the United Kingdom and most of continental Europe. The fate of Malta over the past five hundred years has been determined by many: the Turks, the Spanish *Habsburgs*, the Russians, the French, the Russians, and the Americans, but most often and for the longest time by Britain, which is still present on to the east and west of the island, in Gibraltar and Cyprus. Through no particular fault of their own, the Maltese themselves have had relatively little to do with it all (and for Malta read much of continental Europe). They have been largely objects and not subjects of the European system. Today, *Muscat* speaks not with the democratically legitimated authority of a leader of a federal Europe, but as the passing chairman of a confederation with federal aspirations. When *Bill Clinton* spoke he did so as President of a mighty union, not as a representative of little Arkansas, but who does *Muscat* speak for? Until mainland Europe can answer that question satisfactorily, Britain is unlikely to be quaking in its boots.

This is why a confrontation is so risky for the European Union. The United Kingdom is not comparable to Greece, whose only strength lies in its weakness,

33 E. g. *Gove, M.*: How Britain can help reinvigorate the West, in: *The Times*, 27.01.2017, 25.

34 *Elliott, F./Blakeley, R.*: May prepares to fight for free trade as Trump's first visitor, in: *The Times*, 23.01.2017, 1.

or to Ireland, which was simply told to vote again (twice) when Brussels disapproved of the decisions of its electorate. It is a major power, with a capacity to absorb and to cause pain. If the European Union tries to impose a punitive trade regime in order to compel Britain to accept the free movement of people, and thus a surrender of sovereignty, or simply to punish the UK for Brexit, then London will retaliate.³⁵ The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister have said this in no uncertain terms when they threatened to explore alternative tax regimes. This would be an asymmetrical struggle. On trade, the EU would at first have the upper hand; indeed, a trade war is just about the only thing the Brussels can wage effectively. Unlike Greece, however, Britain cannot be coerced by economic measures alone, and unlike Greece it would adapt and diversify. It could deploy the navy to protect the newly sovereign fishing rights,³⁶ raising the prospect of tension in the Atlantic and the North Sea. Moreover, London would apply the considerable talents and resources of its various institutions to subverting the EU.

Above all, the United Kingdom would be unable to uphold its security guarantees in NATO if those being protected were simultaneously engaged in a vicious war against British livelihoods. In the end, victory would go not to those who can inflict the most, but those who can endure the most, and that is the nations of the United Kingdom. British society will cohere under pressure, whereas the peoples of most European states will wobble. Whatever the rhetoric, there is no real stomach for fighting Britain in Germany, Eastern Europe and in many other member states. The European Union would fragment long before the UK does (alas).

If the continentals wish to change this situation, and it would be in everybody's ultimate interest if they did, they will need to do what the British did in 1707, which is to establish a full political union of nations with a common parliament to sustain the common currency and the common defence. It is the one thing they steadfastly refuse to do. In this sense, the Europeans are driving on the wrong side of the road, and the continent really is cut off, isolated from the basic principles of constitutional construction by its mental fog. The Americans, *Winston Churchill* famously remarked, always do the right thing in the end, having tried all other options first. He might have added that the continental Europeans never exhaust the other possibilities. The continent's travails are not the result of English "vandalism", though they are aggravated by Brexit, but of the innate conti-

35 *Wright, O.*: Hammond tells Brussels to play fair or face trade war, in: *The Times*, 16.01.2017, 14; *N. A.*: May to EU: give us fair deal or you'll be crushed, in: *The Times*, 18.01.2017, 1.

36 *Coates, S./Webster, B.*: May will block fishing waters if talks on Brexit break down, in: *The Times*, 24.03.2017.

mental bent for self-harm. The Europeans have taken the immense economic, military and cultural powers of the continent and shrunk them, so that the whole is far less than the sum of the parts. The record shows Europe's almost infinite capacity for the creative pursuit of political unhappiness. From the historian's point of view, it is a gift that keeps on giving (sadly).

Moreover, once fully engaged against a hostile continent, the entire apparatus of the Foreign Office would be turned to making an (even bigger) "pig's breakfast" of the EU. It would find allies on the continent, pouring salt into Europe's self-inflicted wounds and inflicting new ones. London would return to its traditional policy of an active "balance of power" in Europe. Besides, one should not assume that Britain will be sent, as former President *Obama* had threatened, "to the back of the queue"; the administration has since rowed back rapidly on those threats. Britain may be more dependent on the single market than vice versa, but many sectors, such as German car manufacturers, would be devastated by a trade war. The Irish government, which is obliged by EU law to erect a hard border with any non-member state not part of Schengen, will feel sharper and quicker pain than the UK. Eastern European governments, who look to Britain as a bulwark against Russia, will want to bury the hatchet quickly. Spain has already indicated that it will block the admission of Scotland in order not to create a precedent for Catalonia. None of these states, which together make up a majority of the Union, are likely to pursue a prolonged vendetta against London. In short, while there is widespread dismay, sadness and anger at the British decision, it would be wrong to deduce from that a willingness to place a long-term bet on the victory of the European Union over the United Kingdom.

Of course, there is hardly anybody in the EU who is insane enough to want to add a struggle with the UK to its many other problems, none of which have gone away, and all of which are likely to escalate. The worry is that, given its manifest incoherence, the European Union will "sleep-walk" into such a confrontation. This would turn the United Kingdom into a positive Russia on the western flank of Europe, destabilising it from *outside* and sucking it dry of its most positive and dynamic elements, even more than she already does today.

It does not have to be this way. There is a deal possible which takes all these differing historical trajectories and fundamental geopolitical realities into account. It is based on *Winston Churchill's* original idea of a continental political union in confederation with Britain. The United Kingdom would continue to pay into Europe through NATO over the odds in terms of security. It could either increase its defence expenditure by using the money saved from the EU budget con-

tribution, or it could carry on paying that sum to Brussels as before. Either way, the expenditure should be viewed as a continuation of the subsidies paid by Britain so often in the past to keep the continent safe. In return, Britain would recover her sovereignty through the right to set her own immigration targets, while retaining access to a confederally managed Single Market, including bank “passporting”.

This arrangement, and indeed Brexit generally, requires that the separation between the UK and EU take place simultaneously with the reform of the European unity and clarity about its ultimate destination. First of all, because the failure to offset Brexit in this way will cause political and economic storms, which will carry across the channel. Secondly, because in any new referendum the Scots will need clarity about what sort of European *Union* they are (re-) joining and whether it has a future at all. If the EU developed into a full political union which ended Scottish “independence”, or disintegrated, would this be a “material circumstance” which entitled voters north of the border to seek re-entry into the United Kingdom? All the main issues, in other words, are interlinked. They cannot be addressed in isolation.

If this grand bargain is to work, Britain will have to do much more on defence. She may have to hold the line in Europe for at least four years, possibly for eight. At the moment, the armed services suffer from massive manpower and equipment shortages.³⁷ This means that full-scale rearmament must begin now, with massively increased expenditure on ships, aircraft, “heavy metal” for the army, and cyber-defence. The necessary shift is comparable to that orchestrated by *Sir Henry Wilson* in the early twentieth century, when he began to change the military mission from imperial policing and small wars to preparation for war against a major power in Europe. Politically, Britain urgently needs to clarify its relationship with the rest of the continent. It would have been better if Brexit had never happened, at least not before the EU had sorted itself out, but now it should be expedited without delay so that we can all concentrate on the bigger challenges. This should be based on a grand bargain in which London retains a free-trading relationship with the EU, reserving the right to restrict immigration, in return for its increased commitment to European security through NATO. Britain’s EU budget contribution could be re-allocated as increased defence expenditure to help defend the European Union in the east. Some continental

37 See Evans, M.: Navy carriers can’t stop 400mph Russian missile, in: *The Times*, 27.03.2017, 5; Ripley, T./Hookham, M.: Shrunk army fears Russia could destroy it in an afternoon, in: *The Sunday Times*, 22.01.2017, 9. For a bleak view of current British defence capabilities see Brands, H. et. al.: *Critical assumptions and American grand strategy*, Washington, 2017, 27-28.

Europeans, not only in Poland but also in German business circles, have already begun to see the connection between the two spheres, and the need for a trade-off.

London thus needs to take two messages, one to the EU and the other to Washington. It is a great pity that the Foreign Secretary did not attend the *Trump* post-mortem in Brussels, not to join in the pointless therapy session, but in order to read the Europeans the riot act on Russia. They have already seen that one cannot have a common currency without a common treasury and parliament, that is a common state; and that one cannot have a common travel area without a common border, in effect a common state. Now they are planning to fill the potential American vacuum with a (much-needed) European Army without a European state, something which can only end in further tears. *Mr. Johnson* should have told them that if they wish to survive they need to form a full political union like that which has linked Scotland and England. If that does not appeal, they must increase their individual national military budgets and, if the Americans withdraw from NATO commitments, fall in behind Europe's principal military power, the United Kingdom, or – if that is psychologically easier – a Franco-British Entente.

What really matters now is neither the detail of how article 50 is to be implemented, nor how trade should be managed during and after Brexit, nor how Europe is to be defended as the question-mark over the American commitment to NATO grows, important and often intractable though these issues might be. Rather what matters is the deeper issue of European order. Will the European Union accept that the only answer to its problems is full federal union of the Eurozone and those who wish to join it, in deep confederal association with a sovereign United Kingdom in trade and defence? Or will it insist on making an example of Britain economically, thus precipitating a confrontation across the board in which the Europeans hold much weaker cards than they imagine? Will the United Kingdom encourage the establishment of a stable political union on the continent which would be to her own ultimate benefit? Or will she promote the further dissolution of an already tottering EU, and thus aggravate a crisis of European order which Britain may survive better than any other actor, but at an unacceptable economic and military price? A grand bargain between the two unions is achievable, but confrontation is possible and even likely.

In this context, it is encouraging that the government seems to be thinking of the European order, and Britain's place in it, in broader terms. The problem confronting them today is very similar to that facing their forefathers for hundreds of years. How to construct a European system which is stable enough to provide a viable trading partner and to defend itself, but not so strong or at least so malevo-

lent as to become a threat to the sovereignty of the United Kingdom? How to arrange the relations between the nations of these islands for the benefit of all in the context of severe external challenges? Here *Mrs. May's* speeches at Lancaster House and in Philadelphia, whatever reservations one might have on the detail, pointed in the right direction.³⁸ She spoke both of the “preservation of our own precious union” – that is the United Kingdom, and of her belief that “it remains overwhelmingly and compellingly in Britain’s national interest that the EU should succeed”. She pointedly repeated these words to a Republican audience in Philadelphia, and she bravely nailed *Donald Trump* down on the defence of eastern Europe in Washington. The United Kingdom is, or could be, the best friend the European Union has, if only it would see it.

38 Elliott, F./Blakely, R.: Bullish May tells Trump they can lead the world, in: The Times, 26.01.2017, 1.