



Celebrating 50 Years of the Treaty of Rome

Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP

Minister of State for Europe

Chair – Dr Robin Niblett

Director, Chatham House

Chatham House

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My experience of the European Union has been a central part of my political life. Born in the early 1950's, my generation – the generation of many of the people here today – is the first generation to grow up with the reality of the European Union. And 21 years on from my first election as a Member of the European Parliament, I am as enthusiastic about the European Union as ever.

Because I believe in what Europe has tried to do to rebuild the economic prosperity and stability of the European continent – both in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, but also as a consequence of the end of the Cold War.

And I still believe in its power to transform and change the lives of the people of Europe.

But as an MEP during the 1980s I saw some of the weaknesses of the European Union.

At times perhaps, too inward looking.

With a protectionist instinct, particularly in terms of agriculture.

A failure sometimes to explain *why* we were doing what we were doing in Europe.

I would be the first to acknowledge therefore that Britain has not always had the easiest of relations with first the European Community and then the European Union.

Edward Heath, a Conservative Prime Minister, took us into the European Community.

Margaret Thatcher, said to be a Eurosceptic, nevertheless signed us up to the Single European Act.

John Major negotiated the Maastricht Treaty and, to his credit, pushed it through the House of Commons in the face of determined opposition from within his own party.

Now the British Government, led by Tony Blair, is setting much of the agenda in the European Union.

Don't take my word for this, take that of Jose Manuel Barroso, who said earlier this month that the Europe of the 21st century takes its inspiration in many ways from Britain.

Today I hope to demonstrate to you that the successes of the first fifty years provide a blueprint for the approach we should take in the future. I believe that Europe has worked best when it has followed two approaches:

Firstly, a practical agenda which focuses on one clear aim: improving the lives of almost 500 million Europeans.

Second, an outward approach of proactive engagement with the rest of the world;

The United Kingdom has always encouraged this.

Today, I want to concentrate on four areas which I believe demonstrate the success

of this approach: enlargement, the single market, the European Security and Defence Policy and climate change.

These four policies have played a central part in improving our position. They have brought the big gains of security, stability and prosperity. They have brought smaller, but none the less important benefits to our daily lives.

Establishing Security

It wasn't until 1989 that the EU was able to deliver its promises of European security. And brought us to the position we enjoy now, where war with our neighbours has become unthinkable.

But less than 20 years ago much of central Europe suffered under repressive dictatorships. Freedom of speech was non-existent, economies were underdeveloped, the environment suffered, weapons were stockpiled, and more worryingly, pointed at us.

The prospect of EU membership led to rapid reform across the former Warsaw Pact countries. Economies that for centuries had been moribund, started to record high growth rates, judiciaries and the rule of law were strengthened, civil society began to grow.

These countries had to take difficult decisions to meet the standards of membership, but they have had astounding success. Take Poland, in 1989 it was on the verge of economic collapse, weighed down by foreign debt. Now, UK exports are worth £1.5 billion per annum.

Enlargement is a shared gain. It makes us all more secure, not just from the threat of war, but from new threats like organized crime, terrorism and climate change. Enlarging the single market to almost 500 million consumers has brought opportunities for our businesses. And just as important for our citizens, it allows more freedom to travel and meet and interact with different cultures. One on-line travel company ranks Bulgaria as the number one emerging destination for 2007.

Establishing prosperity

The single market is another example of Europe working at its best. And it, as much as anything, is a tribute to the work of another Conservative, Lord Cockfield – Commissioner when I was a MEP – who died earlier this year. Jose Manuel Barosso paid him a fitting tribute – the man who turned the single market from paper to practice.

This led to direct benefits for Europeans. In the 10 years between 1992 and 2002, the Single Market generated nearly €900 billion in extra prosperity and contributed to a 30% increase in trade in manufactured goods. Today over half of British trade is within the EU.

And it benefits not just our businesses but also our homes. Let me give you an example. Freeing up competition in the telecommunications industry in the 1990s – a key UK objective – resulted in the cost of a fixed line call in the UK falling by more than 50% since 1984.

However, EU membership is about more than shared wealth. It has opened up new opportunities for travel and cultural exchange. We can now live, work, trade and vote across Europe. This was made possible because of the four freedoms. They provide a legal framework which guarantees our shared right to free movement of goods, services, capital and people.

The creation of the single market was the practical mechanism for the removal of barriers that prevented us from fully exercising our rights under the four freedoms. The majority of EU laws and directives continue to do this. They affect every aspect of our lives – from the food safety standards that govern our breakfast cereal, to how safe our roads are on the way to work; our employment rights; how clean our beaches are and how cheap the flights are to get there.

1957 marks another anniversary. On 1 April that year, Panorama broadcast its famous story about the failing Spaghetti harvest in Swiss forests. 50 years on, now a well travelled nation, how many people today would fall for this joke?

We made 53 million visits to the rest of Europe in 2006 – a 50% rise since 1998. 5%

– that's 2.2 million – British Nationals now own property overseas. 4% are in elsewhere in Europe. A huge change in attitudes and culture.

EDSP

I worked as Defence Secretary to develop the European Defence co-operation agenda. It is yet another example of the success Europe can have when it is both outward looking and determined to deliver results.

The European Defence and Security Policy has enabled the EU to make a real difference in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa and post-tsunami Indonesia with 16 missions to date, deploying over 11,000 military personnel and around 600 civilians.

On the Middle East Peace Process, the EU contributes to the international community's efforts. There are currently two EU missions in the region, one supporting the Palestinian Civil Police and the other the Rafah border mission – for which the EU was the only monitoring party acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians. The EU gave a total of €680 million to the Palestinians in 2006, more than in any previous year.

And the EU is the second largest donor in Afghanistan, contributing collectively a third of the aid provided by the international community. Member States provide over 16,000 troops to the International Security Assistance Force and are planning to launch a civilian mission to boost the rule of law.

These policies allow the EU to play a leading international role in matters that concern us – global security and stability. And they help lay the foundation for development aid to be distributed. All vitally important issues for today's Europeans.

Climate Change

But, significantly, the leading EU priority today for British nationals, in the December Eurobarometer poll, was action to combat climate change (43%).

And the EU has responded. In March this year, EU leaders agreed ambitious action to tackle climate change.

This Spring Council underlined EU global leadership on climate change, and set Europe on a fast track to becoming the world's first competitive, energy secure, low carbon economy. Now, the EU can demonstrate to the rest of the world that there is no trade off between economic growth, secure and affordable energy, and tackling climate change.

I hope I have demonstrated that all of these four policies: enlargement, the single market, ESDP and climate change show the relevance the EU has in our lives. That our lives are more secure, more prosperous, more open to new cultures and experiences because we are members of the European Union.

Looking Ahead

The founders of the EU sought to ensure that Europe demonstrated a fundamental point. International relations could no longer be seen through a narrow national position. We needed to work with others on shared issues to meet our own national objectives. This was not in substitution for national action, indeed, it was complimentary to it. We have shared sovereignty to achieve more together than each nation could achieve alone.

In the 21st century, working in partnership with 26 countries is a more sensible approach to issues like climate change and international terrorism than working alone.

I expect the next 50 to be marked by a still greater EU engagement on these global issues. We run huge risks if we decide to turn inwards, whether towards our continent or our nation.

Yet future Enlargement suffers from low public support across Europe. But the strategic, and economic, case for enlarging to the current candidate countries and for keeping the door open to other European neighbours remains as powerful as ever.

There is an alternative. That Turkey, a vibrant young economy looks east. That the Balkans fall off their path of reform and stabilisation and we set up a new dividing line further east, with all the instability and fear that generates. Just as it did after 1989, the prospect of membership can transform these countries and it can bring us new markets and valued partners to fight terrorism and climate change – the things that matter most to us.

The single market too, must continue to look outwards. An increasing number of member states, the UK included, recognise that competitive advantage in a truly single market lies in making life easier for business and enabling wealth creation. But it is the Commission's commitment to tackling these burdens at EU level which will accelerate the drive for a more business-friendly and competitive Europe.

The decision at this month's European Council to reduce administrative burdens by 25% is a huge step in the right direction. It will lead to the single market fulfilling its potential to create €30 billion per annum of economic benefits and up to 600,000 new jobs throughout the EU.

I am pleased to see that much of the EU's current work programme, on issues as diverse as development and education, is firmly based on those things that affect our everyday lives – like cheaper energy, bringing down mobile phone costs and tackling climate change.

We have a proven track record of achievement, concrete proof that in many areas we can do more together than apart. Just as the founders of the EU predicted, 50 years ago.

I hope that these remarks demonstrate my enthusiasm for Europe as well as my appreciation of how it has affected my life, just as it has transformed the lives of all Europeans.

It must learn, not only from its failures but also from its successes: to go on delivering the practical benefits to European lives.