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**THE EXISTENTIAL QUESTION – WILL BRITAIN EVER ‘ACTUALLY’ JOIN THE EU?**

Flying back from Tokyo to Brussels a couple of years ago, I was confronted by the existential question that continues to curdle Britain's relationship with its European partners. My visit to Japan had itself been revealing. I had gone there just after the eruption of a media controversy at home about whether Britain's absence from the euro-zone would have any damaging impact on the enthusiasm of Asians to invest in our country. Most of the press had pooh-poohed the idea. At my first meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr Koizumi, I embarked on a long over-view of the satisfactory state of European relations with his country. As I finished my remarks, Mr Koizumi (barely containing his impatience) came directly to his point. "When," he asked, "is Britain going to enter the Euro-zone?" And so it continued, at meeting after meeting.

Reflecting on this at 40,000 feet, as dawn broke over the frozen Russian landscape below, my reverie was interrupted by a charming stewardess – from Basingstoke, as I recall – who set about laying my table for breakfast. "Do you mind, Mr Patten, if I ask you a personal question?" Wondering what was coming next, I nervously welcomed the enquiry. "Do you think," she said, "that Britain will ever actually join Europe?"

Quite so. Roll away the years. Throw the dust sheets over the conference tables. Pack the visionary waffle back in the lexicons. Wake up from the nightmare that the Brussels jack-boot is stamping on Britain's yeoman neck. Will we ever "actually" - I like that word – join Europe?

The question is a reminder that the analysis of Britain's relationship with Europe – or, to be more prosaically correct, with the other members of the European Union – is a subject for psycho-therapists as much as for political scientists. It is a subject that has divided parties,

consumed the most promising political careers in flames, enfeebled and even destroyed governments, helped to vulgarise and demean parts of our media, distorted the debate about Britain's world role and purpose, and corroded our ability to pursue our national interest. The subject of Europe continues to provoke a collective nervous breakdown in the political classes. Every government eventually succumbs to the same virus. It is as though a higher destiny had ordained that we can only have a relationship with Europe that inevitably becomes fractious and irritating, a relationship that before long has otherwise perfectly serious politicians going through a pantomime of foot-stamping, finger-wagging, name-calling nonsense. Margaret Thatcher campaigned for a "yes" vote in the 1975 European referendum campaign, sent out her Whips to drive the Single European Act through Parliament, and ended her years as Prime Minister raging at the elements that destroyed her as surely as they had earlier swept away both her critics and her acolytes. John Major confident, as he told an audience in Bonn in the Spring of 1991 that Britain was now "where it belongs – at the very heart of Europe", soon found that the heart was beating a tad unsteadily. Black Wednesday was followed by the Maastricht ratification crisis, the Ioannina voting rights struggle, the non-cooperation over BSE and the battenning down of hatches during the Amsterdam Inter-governmental conference. Mr Major's party was dragged by the magnet of Margaret Thatcher's still potent political influence, made more powerful still by its support in much of the Tory press, into adopting increasingly shrill, extreme and periodically ridiculous positions on Europe.

Has the pattern been broken by Mr Blair's government? In part, I suppose it has. The debate is still dominated by red lines and talk of defeats and victories, but Mr Blair to his credit has not yet retreated megaphone in hand to the bunker. He still makes speeches – rather good ones – setting out his positive views on Europe, though he usually travels abroad to do so. On the other hand, if you apply the Government's own initial tests of success, the story looks rather different. Mr Blair was determined when he came into power to make Britain comfortable with its position in Europe, and in June 1998 his closest colleague Peter Mandelson, claiming to speak for the Prime Minister (why should we disbelieve that?), explained what that meant. In 7 to 10 years time, he argued, Britain should count as much as France or Germany in the European Union, an outcome which he conceded would only be possible if Britain joined the economic and monetary union. We know what happened, or did not happen. We resolved to be indecisive. So while we are not yet back in the trenches, a year that brought the bust-up over Iraq, and the postponement *sine die* of any decision over entry



into EMU, could certainly not be regarded as a triumphant time for the achievement of Mr Blair's original objectives.

Of course the current enthusiasm for what ministers call trilateralism – Mr Blair's understandable efforts to muscle in on the Franco-German partnership – may be the shape of things to come. An enlarged Union cannot go on as before so perhaps we do need a new answer. But that answer brings new questions of its own: will the French and Germans want us enough for it to work? Will the UK ever be willing to accept the give-and-take in policy outcomes that will be involved (perhaps we should take heart from Britain's willingness to do so in discussions with the US)? And would this approach deliver the widespread sense of consensus and participation required to make the EU work? Will the trilateralists be able to convince the other twenty-two that they are not seeking to establish a *directoire*?

Why is the European question so difficult for us? What is the problem? We grumble about loss of sovereignty while our Westminster Parliament is gutted by the executive, and our unwritten constitution is regularly re-written on the back of an envelope. We point to our geography – an off-shore archipelago, peopled by sea-farers whose nostrils twitch in the Atlantic breeze – while we travel and work more than ever before in the neighbouring lands of our continent, and go there increasingly to set up home taking Marmite to Malaga and Weetabix to the Dordogne. We buy, by the standards of our European partners, prodigious quantities of newspapers, at least half of which court predominantly nationalist solutions to everything except the question of who owns the press.

So it is not easy to unpick all the pieces and discover exactly what lies at the centre of the problem. But let me suggest five reasons for our uncertainty and our general grumpiness. It is not an exhaustive list.

First, the most telling as well as best-known criticism of the United Kingdom's post-war geo-strategic ambitions and dilemmas was Dean Acheson's observation that we had lost an empire but failed to find a role. To most of the American and European Founding Fathers of the post-war world, it seemed obvious that our role should be leading and driving the integration of Europe. But that is not how it seemed to us. Churchill, of course, saw the historic necessity of a united Europe but was at best ambivalent about exactly how Britain should fit into the design. We were "*with* Europe, but not *of* it...linked, but not comprised...interested

and associated, but not absorbed”, he declared. That view had some salience after the Second World War - why should we become enmeshed in the politics of exhausted, defeated, destroyed neighbours? We could stand at the intersection between three overlapping rings – America, the Commonwealth and Europe. We had the special relationship with America to help provide us with our allegedly independent nuclear weapon. We had the leadership of the Commonwealth to give clout to our global aspirations. Why turn our back on our friends – their first-cousin familiarity, their values, their butter and their lamb – and lock ourselves into structures that were unlikely to succeed, or could only do so at the price of our Atlanticist freedom? Perhaps it took Suez as well as the remarkable speed at which the German economy overtook our own to convince us that the Fellowship of the three Rings was not going to provide us with an adequate infrastructure for our diplomacy, our economic prosperity and our security. So Mr Macmillan applied for membership of the Common Market and when his suit was rejected by General de Gaulle in 1963 wrote in his diary, “All our policies at home and abroad are in ruins. We have lost everything, except our courage and determination.” The determination to try, eventually successfully, again and again.

But forty years on, the same sense that we are not really at home with Europeans, that our place lies pre-eminently with our friends to the West, that we can cut a global dash on our own and should avoid being tied down by European entanglements, infuses discussion about our role in the world. What exactly should that quasi-independent role be. It is not very clear.

In his book “Patriots” – a study of national identity in Britain in the last century – Richard Weight, drawing on the work of film historians, takes the very popular 1969 film, “The Italian Job”, as a reflection of Britain’s attitude to Europe. Many of you may recall that the film tells the tale of a gold bullion robbery in Turin. A gang of studio-perfect “true Brit” types, led by Michael Caine, takes Italy by storm in its Minis, pinches the gold from under the noses of the “bloody foreigners”, and makes its escape in a coach. Driving fast through the Alps, the gangsters take a bend too quickly, and just manage to halt the coach with half of the vehicle hanging over the mountain’s edge. The gold bullion is at the rear of the coach, the robbers at the front. There they are “in limbo”, Mr Weight suggests, “suspended between an imperial identity and a European one.” Which way to go? “Er, hang on a minute lads,” Michael Caine says as the credits roll, “I’ve got a great idea.” What is our great idea? Is it permanent suspension? Limbo for life?



Some seem to think that we have found our role at last in what Winston Churchill called “the thankless deserts of Mesopotamia”, on active service with Mr Rumsfeld. But listen to these wise words of Lord Hurd, in a recent debate in the House of Lords –

“I worry that the Government have put too much weight on the single strand of the Anglo-American alliance, essential though that remains. It is no longer an adequate means of sustaining an effective British foreign policy. I do not blame the Americans in particular for that. It is not their fault that the disproportion between the two partners, Britain and America, has grown to the extent that British influence is no longer, in the light of recent experience, likely to be effective within the Alliance”.

Lord Hurd noted that we had been Junior partners before, at D-Day and in the Gulf War in 1991, for example, and then went on, “However, on neither occasion, were our policy and our Armed Forces subordinated to the extent that they have been in post-Saddam Iraq..... Much alarm,” he continued, “has been expressed about proposals for European defence. I share some of those anxieties, but nothing that I have seen contemplated, even by the most far-fetched and hot-headed enthusiasts of European defence, approaches the degree of subordination of our own policy that we have accepted in post-Saddam Iraq.”

A second strand in our relationship with Europe has been the sense that we are fundamentally different from them – different and superior. Margaret Thatcher conceded in her famous Bruges speech in 1988 that links with Europe had been “the dominant factor in our history”, but she and many others still looked back – to borrow a phrase from John Major – “to a golden age that never was”. Golden and gloriously insular, “this blessed plot” (the punning title of Hugo Young’s masterly book on Britain and Europe) had a longer and deeper tradition of liberty, parliamentary democracy and law than our European neighbours; we had twice in less than 30 years come to their aid when they threatened to engulf our continent in fire and blood; we were outward looking, independent-spirited and entrepreneurial. And it took a deep sense of magnanimity on our part to forgive them for being, well, foreign – especially when they were German or French. “I tries ’ard,” Ernest Bevin told the commander of the British occupation forces in Germany after the war, “but I ’ates [the Germans].” Perhaps we are more forgiving today, though Margaret Thatcher’s famous Chequers seminar at the cusp of German reunification was not a high point in Anglo-German relations. And France?

Anyone who thinks we have been and are today better behaved about "l'hexagon" should return to the coverage of French policy in the run-up to the Iraq conflict.

Today, we are told that our superiority can be measured in honest British coin. Mr Brown has recently made rather a speciality of moving speeches comparing the inadequacy of economic performance in other European countries with pluperfect Britain. From time to time, as I read the comparison between this golden age in Britain, and the grim problems that crowd in on Euro-zone economies, I feel that the only half-way adequate response is to send food parcels. The real figures, however, tell a different story. Five EU member states are richer than Britain. Look at productivity. Again, we have lower productivity levels than all but three member states – Spain, Portugal and Greece. The gap between our productivity levels and those of France is growing. ~~On~~ Hardly the engine room of Europe. In other areas where Mr Brown's speeches might have left the impression that we are blazing a trail, we in fact lag behind some of our allegedly sclerotic neighbours. Thus, four member states have a lower unemployment rate than Britain's admirably modest level. Advocates of our proud trading heritage who scorn the "old inward looking trade bloc" (as Gordon Brown did in the Daily Telegraph last November) might also be surprised to discover that the UK trades a considerably smaller share of its economy (42% of GDP) than Germany (57%) and is surpassed even by those alleged bastions of protectionism France (45%) and Italy (43%). Wolfgang Munchau of the Financial Times has pointed out that the Eurozone runs a trade surplus of around 1.1% of GDP, while the UK runs a trade deficit of 0.8% of GDP. Our "superiority" is not, therefore, quite as marked when you look at the figures. Nor is it obvious that the consumer of public services – the train passenger, the hospital patient – in Britain is better off than our Continental cousins. But I imagine these speeches perform some service to Mr Brown into which I am too fastidious to pry.

Worries about sovereignty are the cause of a third set of concerns. Now sovereignty is a notoriously slippery concept. It is not a finite, political commodity – here one moment, gone the next. But that is how it is invariably discussed – bearing one simple political meaning, our ability to manage our own affairs largely on our own. I inserted the word "largely", assuming generously that not even the most extreme sovereigntist believes that we can run Britain entirely on our own, "master of our fate, captain of our soul."



To the sovereigntist, Europe comes like a thief in the night, pilfering and desecrating the national political symbols of our island home. Let us be clear – clearer than some may have wanted to be at the outset of the debate about whether Britain should join Europe. Integration – political and economic – does involve pooling and sharing sovereignty. We do that to greater and lesser extents in international organisations like NATO and the UN, and we certainly do it in Europe whenever we agree that we can cope better with common problems or augment our ability to pursue our national interest by doing things together and by establishing supranational institutions or rules to manage the policies that we have agreed to share.

And here lies what I believe to be one of the most interesting problems today in political science. The nation state remains everywhere the unit most able to attract and reflect the loyalties of individual citizens. Yet citizens in many countries recognise that their interests cannot be protected or advanced by their national governments on their own. Crime, disease, terrorism, drugs, trade, the environment – all demand co-operation between national governments. Co-operating, they establish international organisations to manage the sovereignty they are sharing. But these institutions do not command the same understanding and loyalty that citizens customarily feel towards their national institutions. This is not just a problem for the institutions of the European Union. Others in different ways face similar problems – the WTO, the IMF, the United Nations especially perhaps in its relationship with American citizens. This is the real sovereignty issue. Not, how we can do everything on our own? But, how can we increase the accountability of the arrangements that our history as well as our concerns about our present and future have obliged us to establish.

Fourth, The European Union also suffers from being thought to be the political product of an elite, something foisted on the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. This is not a uniquely British feeling. Fifty years ago Raymond Aron wrote, “The European idea is empty.... It was created by intellectuals, and that fact accounts for its genuine appeal to the mind and its feeble appeal to the heart.” The strongest appeal to the heart has probably stemmed from the historic act of reconciliation between France and Germany which was the Union’s real genesis. I hope that welcoming the countries of the former Soviet Empire, cut off from us for forty years by walls and tanks and barbed wire, back into the European family will have as much appeal to hearts at least in those countries that are coming home. Otherwise we have to rely on what we can achieve together – security for our citizens, jobs,

higher living standards, a cleaner environment – to make the European case. This touches for me on two issues that are relevant to the halt that political reality has called for the time being to the efforts to agree on an all-embracing constitutional treaty for Europe.

The most successful institutional changes in Europe have come at the service of policies. We wished, for example, to make the single market work more effectively so we introduced greater majority voting to manage it. We wanted to introduce a single currency, hence the Maastricht treaty. We wanted to develop a more coherent approach to external relations so we changed the treaties and appointed a High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. Where the institutional debate seems divorced from practical ends it is always more likely to run into difficulties. The work of the Inter-Governmental Conference, following the Convention, needs to be seen clearly to be focussed on the practical issue of making a Union of 25 or more work effectively.

Some think that it cannot work better with twenty-five member states, or at least can only do so at a risk to the political dynamics that have dominated Europe to date. I suspect that is true, and that in practise the high-water mark of the original Union was passed at the time that M. Delors stepped down from the Presidency of the Commission in the mid-90s and three new Member States arrived, increasing the number to 15. Twenty five and more will be different, but not somehow less genuinely European. Europe is more than France, more than Germany, more than Britain. Moreover, I am puzzled to hear that it will only be small groups of pioneer countries, working more closely together, who can according to some, carry the flag for the real Europe. Of course, it is possible to have flexible arrangements for greater co-operation among groups of countries. That can and does happen today, without destroying the whole structure or riding roughshod over the interest of a group of semi-outsiders. But flexibility requires stronger institutions, not weaker ones, otherwise the whole contraption will fly apart. It is also important to define what we want enhanced co-operation for? What are the purposes of the “pioneers”? If pioneering becomes synonymous with lax application of agreed rules and laws, the prevention of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the dilution of attempts to liberalise our continent-wide economy, and the undermining of fair and sensible arrangements for economic governance, then I am not sure that this is a European vision that will or should appeal either to Raymond Aron’s intellectuals or to anyone else for that matter. I very much hope that Mr Blair’s forays into trilateralism will not see us tarred with this brush.



A fifth characteristic of our own European affair is our consistent belief that whatever the others are up to is probably bad and will certainly not work. This attitude existed from the very beginning. The Foreign Office's reaction to the Schuman plan which, in 1950, laid the first building block for the new Europe, was to denounce France for behaving extremely badly by springing the proposal on the world without consultation. Britain refused on principle to join in any talks on a plan for pooling the coal and steel industries of France and Germany and placing decision-making in the hands of a supranational body. In Clement Attlee's words this would be "utterly undemocratic and responsible to nobody". The story continued from Messina to Rome, and on to today and the launch of the single currency.

The construction of the European Union has not been smooth, nor easy nor a matter of triumph piled on triumph. But what has been put together represents an astonishing – indeed unique – sharing of sovereignty involving today almost every nation state in Europe as present Members, Members-in-waiting, or aspirant Members. What is surprising is not that we lurch from drama to drama, but that we move forward so fast and, for most of the time, so effectively. When eventually we in Britain join the euro-zone, as most of our public seem to think inevitable, we will doubtless bemoan the fact once again that we have not been around for longer shaping the rules and leading the economic debate, and we will also I suspect ask ourselves what all the fuss was about.

All the issues I have mentioned in a sense play into what is for me the crucial question. The question – what should be our relationship with Europe? folds into the question – what sort of people do we think we are? Answering the question about Europe answers the question about us.

We in Britain have a great history. We are the heirs to a great intellectual and literary tradition. We have - no thanks to successive British Governments – great universities. Our Armed Forces are as efficiently professional as they are over-stretched. All that, and much more, is true. We count for something in the world and, whether through the BBC World Service, or the British Council, or our aid programmes, or our trading instincts, or our diplomatic service, we make ourselves felt. To recycle an old saw, we punch above our weight. So, as James Bond says to Tiger Tanaka in "You Only Live Twice" –

“England may have been bled pretty thin by a couple of world wars” – note the use of “England” – “our Welfare State policies may have made us expect too much for free, and the liberation of our Colonies may have gone too fast, but we still climb Everest and beat plenty of the world at sports, and win plenty of Noble prizes.....There’s nothing wrong with the British people.”

The sentiments, for all their period charm are not wholly misplaced, and we have at least continued to win Nobel Prizes at an impressive rate – 58 from 1901-1964; 43 from 1965-2003.

Where we get into trouble is when we give the impression in the words of Noel Coward (admittedly writing a lyric about “the pillars of London society”) that “Nature selected us/perfected us”, and that we are “Firmly convinced our position is really unique”. Others have had to escape from the terrible traumas of their own history. Understandably, we do not feel the need to do that. But we should not be trapped by our history in a cocoon of claustrophobic self-regard. We cannot live happily ever after within the covers of Arthur Bryant’s History of Britain.

Consider only the most quantifiable of the relevant comparisons. What do the economic figures tell us? Our GDP – absolute, sadly, not per capita – is roughly level with that of France. Fine. But Germany’s is about 1.7 times the size of ours, Japan’s 2.3 times; the United States’ almost seven times. No great surprise perhaps, we’re getting used to that. But looking to the future we would do well to notice that China’s economy, currently growing at close to ten per cent per year, is already four times the size of the UK’s. Even India, once the Jewel in our Crown, has an economy 1.7 times the size of the UK’s, with considerably more impressive growth rates. It is no counsel of despair to observe that Blair’s Britain and Thatcher’s weighs in globally below Churchill’s and Macmillan’s of the 1950s and 1960s, and that their Britain was relatively less strong than Neville Chamberlain’s. We are middle-weight not heavy-weight, and need occasionally to consider the implications of that.

My intention this evening is, principally, to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. But I am not averse to a bit of didactic counselling. So how do I think any Prime Minister of Britain, well-disposed as Mr Blair is and Mr Major was, to making a success of our partnership with Europe should tackle Britain’s Euro-psychosis?



I begin from the assumption that you cannot win a debate unless you take part in it. There are various forms of Euro-scepticism – some simply reflect misunderstandings about what is happening in Europe; some reflect gut instincts; some reflect deep hostility to the whole enterprise; some reflect opinions on what Europe would be like if only the Europeans would understand the error of their present ways; and so on. Whatever the brand of scepticism, you cannot deal with it by lying doggo, by keeping your head down and trying to avoid antagonising those newspapers edited by Paul Dacre, or owned by Rupert Murdoch or – at least until recently – by Lord Black, that well-known British peer. The respected columnist Peter Riddell wrote the other day that there did not seem anymore to be a pro-European political party in Britain. Certainly the pro-European argument has been thinly deployed. If Mr Blair still shares his initial well-expressed enthusiasms – as I believe he does – I hope he will risk the wrath of Wapping and send his ministers out day by day to spread the word.

In particular, it is crucial to tackle three issues.

First, we have no choice but to make a success of our place in Europe. No, let me rephrase that. We do not have one choice. We can quit Europe. It is not impossible; it would not unleash Biblical plagues on our island; we could doubtless survive. But we would be poorer. We would certainly have less real sovereignty or independence. Given the cat's cradle of economic, trading, environmental and other relationships with Europe, we would fetch up with all the enhanced liberty that would accompany absenting ourselves from making the decisions that intimately affect our lives. It would be the first time in a millennium that we would have chosen to demote ourselves to a lower league.

Nor should we kid ourselves that somehow Europe would be obliged to accommodate our every whim and interest, and would even be attracted by our vision of a club made up of those prepared to co-operate with us on our own terms. Remember E.F.T.A.

If we discount the choice of quitting, what is there to be said for doing anything other than trying to make the greatest possible success of the whole endeavour? We are not week-end members. Our national interest is best served when Europe as a whole does well.

There is a relationship between our effectiveness in Europe and the domestic debate on Europe. We are more likely to be able to persuade other European Member States to support us in securing our own aims if we can convince public opinion in the United Kingdom that a whole-hearted commitment by Britain in Europe's institutions is in our best interests. The suspicion that we are somehow semi-detached from Europe, that we are ambivalent about its success, that – to quote Joschka Fischer – we do not know what we want, is deeply damaging to the achievement of our goals and to our ability to play a leading role in shaping the agenda.

We should also recognise that we are more likely to get what we want if there are strong and effective institutions with clearly defined goals. In an excellent pamphlet, "Can Britain lead in Europe?" published over 5 years ago, Charles Grant recalled Jean Monnet's observation in his memoirs that "Unlike many people I never feared that the entry of Great Britain would impair the smooth functioning of the Community. 'They want things to work', I explained 'and when they see that Europe can only work through its institutions they will be the strongest defenders of them'." Alas, that has not been the story of the last 25 years.

Europe's institutions are the arrangements that we have helped to create in order to run policy in the areas where we want to co-operate. It is self-destructive for Britain – and for other Member States as well – to disparage those institutions, to treat them like the enemy, to celebrate populist victories over organisations that were established to look beyond day to day national interests. I would not wish to see an over-mighty Commission, bloated and arrogant. But nor do I want a weak Commission, unable to manage independently policies that are sometimes necessarily uncomfortable, too anxious and defensive to give an intellectual lead in policy-making or to play the valuable role of pointing out when the Emperor has no clothes.

A more effective and successful European Union, with Britain more comfortable "at its heart" (to return to that phrase), is not an alternative to the Trans-Atlantic relationship. That relationship is stronger when Europe is capable of acting more coherently – paradoxically, even when we disagree. To make the choice for a stronger Europe is not to choose hostility to the United States. But we will not always agree with our American partners, and when we disagree we should have the confidence to say so and the ability to act not simply to criticise. We would, for example, be kidding ourselves to believe that we could have secured an



American climb-down in the steel dispute as anything other than an active member of a coherent and weighty trading bloc.

The second thing we need to do is to understand ourselves, and to explain to a doubtless surprised electorate, that we have been a great deal more successful in Europe than we allow ourselves to believe. There is a surprising self-contempt about our record in Europe, and a blindness to the problems that everyone else faces. We seem to see every meeting as another battle that we are doomed to lose to the wily foreigners. When we win, we decline to believe it or report it. If we do not get our own way, it is humiliation for battling Blighty – another case of our bananas being straightened or our bangers banned.

The truth is different. Whether securing budgetary discipline in Europe, battling for a real single market, leading the campaign to liberalise the European economy, promoting the biggest enlargement in the EU's history, or preparing the ground for an enhanced European contribution to our own security, Britain has secured most of its attainable strategic objectives. Others, like the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, have proved tougher to secure (although even there we ought to acknowledge that there is movement in the right direction, however slow and painful it might be). But the need for reform does of course recall the Irish traveller's dilemma that we should not have been starting from here.

We should ensure, too, that we do not end up with a European Parliament so remote from the electors that its claim to democratic legitimacy were merely a fig-leaf for the obsessions of individual members. There is no reason to doubt that today's MEPs are as devoted and conscientious, anxious to promote the concerns of their electors, as many of their national counterparts. But if public discussion in the UK continues to portray them as out of touch and in it for themselves, we risk fulfilling those low expectations and reducing participation in European elections below its already embarrassing levels.

Finally, and very briefly, debate in the Convention and in the Inter-Governmental Conference, and comment and discussion on those debates in many of the Member States, should remind us that we have a historic opportunity to mould the way that the European Union evolves. The issues that concern us – democratic accountability, subsidiarity, defining where Europe really does add value – are of equal concern to others. Were we to open our eyes wider, were we to listen a little harder, we would discover that we are not "loners", obsessed with political

and institutional issues that register no blips on other radar screens. We have the chance to put a cogent and coherent vision of Europe's future, and the opportunity to win converts to our side provided we can convince them that we are committed to a successful Europe. First, though, we need to convince ourselves. And that will only happen if we strip away some of the falsehoods that definitions of nationhood everywhere require. We should see ourselves as we really are. That way we have the chance to be more than we will otherwise become.

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