

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is an honour and a privilege to be with you this evening!

I would like to thank the University of Strasbourg and its Vice-President in charge of international relations, Irini Tsamadou-Jacobberger, and, of course, the *Collège Européen Doctoral* and Stephane Ley, for inviting me to address you tonight. My thanks also to your academic supervisor, Christopher Mueller.

I have been asked to speak to you about Brexit and its consequences.

I will try to do so although apart from the fact that our Prime Minister, Mrs Theresa May has told us on umpteen occasions that Brexit means Brexit, **we** don't really know, and perhaps **she** doesn't really know what Brexit means.

Even the recently published White Paper on Brexit says more about what Brexit **won't** be rather than what it **will be**.

Tonight I will try to convey to you my feelings and thoughts about Brexit which to a greater or a lesser extent are probably shared by very many of the more than 14 million people who voted to remain in the European Union.

I wanted to make this point at the outset because all too often **we tend to lump everyone together** in a caricatural sort of way forgetting that if 52% voted to leave 48% voted to remain.

We need to remember that there are **many pro European people** in the British Isles and not just in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Anecdotally I could point out to you that from 2008 to 2013 the President of the **Union of European Federalists** was a British Liberal MEP, Andrew Duff.

As you will by now have gathered I am pro Europe and pro the European Union!

I have spent most of my working life trying to promote European values, European culture and European unification.

Well, very late on June 23rd, last year, my world was shattered.

The previous afternoon I had stood on Trafalgar Square in London at a ceremony to commemorate the life of Jo Cox, the young MP from the north of England who had been shot dead a few days earlier. As the large crowd listened to moving speeches a plane twice flew low overhead. It was trailing a banner urging people to vote to leave the European Union.

For me, that plane symbolised the callous, insensitive, and deceitful campaign which tricked so many people into rejecting Europe and sending Britain into uncharted waters.

I have still not come to terms with the referendum result, and quite frankly, I am not sure I ever will.

Today more than 6 months on I still feel great sadness, great disappointment, almost a feeling of bereavement!

I, like many of my fellow countrymen, feel we have been cheated because of all the lies and misrepresentations in what can only be called a post-truth campaign.

I feel I have been robbed of part of my identity since I shall no longer enjoy the advantages of European citizenship.

There is a certain irony about that because many years ago when I married my wife who is a Portuguese national we used to joke that she did so to be able to get a residence permit to live in the EU! But now the tables are turned and she will be able to say that I remain with her in order not to be expelled from Europe!

I also feel a sense of shame that my country is turning its back on Europe and everything it stands for.

I am horrified that someone like Boris Johnson, who distorts the truth as easily as Donald Trump, is today the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom.

Having said that, I don't want to bore you with my personal reactions. So let us now take a look at **how and why** the United Kingdom ended up holding a referendum on its continuing membership of the European Union which could, and in my opinion, should have been avoided.

Europe has always been a **highly divisive issue** in Britain in spite of the fact that **Winston Churchill** is credited with being one of its founding fathers and in spite of the fact that **Margaret Thatcher** was one of the leading exponents of the Single Market and of the enlargement eastwards of the European Union.

Back in the late 40s and early 50s on the right of British politics there were those who wanted to focus on the UK's relationship with the former British Empire and those who saw the opportunities a united Europe could offer.

On the left there was a comparable divide between those who saw the European project as a means of protecting and promoting capitalistic interests and those of a more social democratic inclination who took a more pragmatic approach.

In many ways those same cross-party divisions were mirrored in the referendum campaign and are also present in other European countries and, notably in France as we saw in the recent primary elections on the right and the left of the French political spectrum.

Over the years, in the UK, **anti-European sentiment** was fuelled by a combination of a highly aggressive right wing tabloid press and unscrupulous politicians of the left and the right who would systematically blame "Brussels" for anything which went wrong even if it had absolutely nothing to do with Europe.

European institutions and Brussels bureaucrats became the scapegoats for eurosceptics.

The first moves to get a referendum organised began over 20 years ago when in 1994 Sir James Goldsmith, an Anglo-French business tycoon, founded the short-lived anti-EU Referendum Party many of whose members would subsequently join the United Kingdom Independence Party otherwise known as UKIP and led for many years by the notorious MEP Nigel Farage.

Ironically Jimmy Goldsmith had been elected to the European Parliament in 1994 in France as a member of *La Majorité pour l'autre Europe* on which he modelled his UK Referendum Party.

The birth of UKIP was perceived as a threat by the Tory party because many right wingers shared UKIP's eurosceptic views.

Tory leaders would lean over backwards in order to appease its right wing and UKIP.

But the threat continued to grow until David Cameron finally gave into the pressure for a referendum which should never have happened and which illustrates only too well how democratic values are being undermined today both in Europe and elsewhere.

I just wonder how you can have a democratic conclusion to a referendum on leaving Europe particularly when the result is so close (51.8 to 48.1 %) and when 2 of the UK's component parts voted to remain in the EU: Scotland with 62% and Northern Ireland with 55%.

When I say a democratic conclusion I am referring to a basic principle of democracy as a European value.

Democracy does not and should not mean that 52% of the population impose their will on the other 48% and all the less so when parts of the so-called United Kingdom voted by a clear majority to stay in the EU. There is a real problem there.

Be that as it may, David Cameron did attempt to assuage the right wing of the Tory party and rushed into the referendum believing he would win easily.

That no doubt explains why there was such careless preparation. The **wording of the question** (Leave / Remain) could have been phrased otherwise; **Expats** could, indeed should, have been allowed to vote; **a 2/3 threshold** could, indeed should have been required; and surely some **contingency planning** should have been undertaken just in case the referendum went the other way!

No wonder Mr Cameron felt obliged to resign after the result was known!

In purely formal terms the referendum was democratic but where does that leave the other 48%?

The campaign, particularly the Leave campaign was based on exaggeration, misrepresentation and downright lies. The Remain campaign essentially depicted an ever worsening economic situation which has of course not materialised so far because Brexit itself has not occurred.

Here are a few examples of the cynical lies bandied around by the leaders of the Leave campaign and then denied within hours of the result on 24 June:

- Bus touring the country painted with claim that 350 million pounds per week would be saved for NHS. This was denied a few hours after the referendum by Farage;
- Reduction in immigration denied by Daniel Hannan, MEP on Newsnight on 24 June;

- Farage poster: We are at breaking point against a background of refugees **in Greece or Macedonia**;
- Continual reference to overstretched health, welfare and educational services **explicitly or implicitly due to immigrants**, and particularly EU immigrants who in fact pay their way!
- Remain leaflet with map including Syria and Irak
- Take back control slogan cf Fisheries
- Anti-immigrant rhetoric which created a feeling of impunity and unleashed people's tongues.

All this contributed to the victorious "leave" vote and as I mentioned earlier many of these claims were relayed by strongly anti-EU media which had begun their campaign years before along with with politicians of all political persuasions (except the Liberals).

There were also very clear demographic, social and geopolitical divides:

- **Cosmopolitan**, globe-trotting educated urban populations
- **Less privileged, less educated classes** victims of globalisation, unemployment and **austerity** (use the word advisedly 'cos of Tory gov/George Osborne policies to reduce public expenditure;
- **For:** Young people (17 to 25 year olds) 75% pro EU but many were not registered due to change in registration rules;
- **Against:** The elderly, the unemployed and those with a strongly English identity who looked back nostalgically to a oh so perfect pre- EU Britain which never actually existed;
- Scotland and N Ireland (and London) which voted to remain in the EU as opposed to England.

• **Other factors which certainly influenced "leave" voters included:**

- Failure to reduce immigration
- Cameron's failure to convince people he had got a good deal for Britain and general mistrust of a PM who had portrayed himself as a eurosceptic at one point to appease his right wing
- Failure of Remain to attract media big hitters like Bojo and failure to argue its case convincingly
- Failure of EU to promote itself positively
- Rejection of badly explained top-down regulation

Before moving on I must explain why I said the UK referendum was an illustration of the way democratic values are being undermined in Europe and elsewhere.

Unfortunately there is a growing tendency in a number of European countries for the party which wins an election to think that it can ride roughshod over those opposed to it.

We have seen this happen in Hungary where Mr Orban famously declared himself in favour of "illiberal democracy" whatever that dangerous concept may mean.

In Poland, in Turkey, in Russia, in Azerbaijan, to name but a few, authoritarian governments are not only disregarding their opposition but they are actively and illegally trying to silence critical voices, civil society and human rights activists.

This is unfortunately but one aspect of what I think we can term a crisis of values which is threatening the very foundations of the European project which at the outset was intended to bring the countries of Europe closer together for their mutual benefit.

This brings me back to the British referendum which I am afraid illustrates only too well the way in which politicians, not just in the United Kingdom, mislead, misrepresent and, well lets be charitable! .... the way in which they are all too frequently more than economic with the truth!

The philosophy underpinning Brexit, under the slogan "We must take back control", was based on rejection of everything the European Union stands for.

Brexiters campaigned against freedom of movement and immigration while at the same time claiming that they had had enough of so-called "experts" and attacking "élites" deliberately forgetting that they themselves are part of those "élites" .

Hypocrisy is one thing but creating false expectations and misleading the electorate is quite another!

One of the most striking examples of hypocrisy was the furore around the question of invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty which is the detonator for the whole process of leaving the EU.

Having spent much of the campaign explaining that democracy meant returning power from the European Parliament in Strasbourg to the House of Commons in Westminster, the Leavers and the new Prime Minister, Mrs May, were resolutely opposed to consulting Parliament about **if and when** to start the A.50 process.

As I am sure you know a case was brought before the British Courts and the government was put in the humiliating position of having to backtrack and introduce special legislation on this question which is currently being scrutinised in the House of Lords after being adopted in the Commons by a large majority.

You, like me, are certainly wondering why, after all the drama of a court case, the decision went through so easily.

It is hard to understand but the 2 main political have chosen to accept the very close result of the rather dubious referendum as gospel truth even though practically all politicians have their own particular interpretation of what the voters actually meant.

Resignation seems to have replaced resistance. Only one conservative (Ken Clarke) voted against the Government on Article 50. The Labour party was split (feeble Jeremy Corbyn leadership).

Only the Liberal Democrats (reduced from 56 to only 9 since 2015) and the Scottish Nationalist Party (54) put up a real fight but they were outnumbered by far!

And as for Mrs May, she believes the referendum result means exiting the single market, leaving the Custom's Union, extricating the UK from the clutches of the ECJ, and stopping immigration from the EU.

The Government published its White Paper on leaving the EU earlier this month after MPs voted in favour of triggering Article 50 by 498 votes to 114. It is a somewhat surrealistic since it is basically a wish list.

To give you some idea here are the main points in the document:

1. Providing certainty and clarity (What does that mean!?)
2. Taking back control of legislation: ie Ending the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the UK.
3. Strengthening the union – Securing a deal that works for the entire UK – for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all parts of England. We remain fully committed to the Belfast Agreement and its successors.(Scottish referendum! Other consequences in Scotland if violence returns in NI !)
4. Protecting historic ties with Ireland; Work for a practical solution to maintain the common travel area and ensure the integrity of the UK's immigration system. (A contradiction in terms!? ( Bertie Ahern's comments! Danger of bringing back border controls!)
5. Controlling immigration ie. over the number of EU nationals coming to the UK. (Recent report at best 15% drop in net immigration. UK needs EU immigrants both in demographic and practical terms).
6. Securing rights for EU nationals in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU.
7. Protecting workers' rights – "We will protect and enhance existing workers' rights". (difficult to believe in the mouth of a Tory PM cf Margaret Thatcher!)
8. Ensuring free trade with European markets! (there is the rub particularly in the financial Services sector)
9. Securing new trade agreements with other countries across the world!
10. Ensuring the UK remains the best place for science and innovation!
11. Cooperating in the fight against crime and terrorism – UK will continue to work with the EU to preserve European security, to fight terrorism, and to uphold justice across Europe. (But what about ECHR!!)
12. Delivering a smooth, orderly exit from the EU – a phased process of implementation, in which both the UK and the EU institutions and the remaining EU member states prepare for the new arrangements. (Well only time will tell)

QUOTE FROM WHITE PAPER DEMONSTRATING IT IS NOTHING MORE THAN A WISH LIST!

## "68 The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union

And this strong partnership between a sovereign UK and a thriving EU will be at the heart of a new global UK: a UK which will emerge from this period of change stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before. A UK which is secure, prosperous and tolerant – a magnet for international talent and a home to the pioneers and innovators who will shape the world ahead. A truly global UK – the best friend and neighbour to our European partners, but a country that reaches beyond the borders of Europe too. A country that goes out into the world to build relationships with old friends and new allies alike."

As I told you at the outset we now know some things Brexit does not mean. But what it will actually become in the end is in the lap of the Gods in Brussels, Washington and capitals around the world.

A relationship with Donald Trump will be more than complicated since a large sector of British public opinion has already shown its opposition to Trump's policies.

What will happen with the EU is anyone's guess. Will the EU governments stick together or will each try to get the best possible deal for itself as Jean Claude Juncker seems to fear?

How receptive will other countries be to Mrs May's overtures?

One thing seems pretty certain: any trade deal, bi-lateral or multilateral, will almost certainly be accompanied by an agreement on immigration and that will inevitably be to the detriment of the UK's wish to curb the entry of foreign workers.

But what are the likely consequences of Brexit in broader terms?

- Both the EU and the UK will suffer a loss in economic, political and diplomatic terms
- **Economically** because UK is 4th or 5th biggest world economy but Britain will probably suffer even more.
- **Politically** because Brexit is altering the balance of power in the EU in relation to Germany particularly at a time when France is politically and economically in troubled waters;
- **Politically** because Brexit will no doubt encourage eurosceptics and fuel other attempts to disrupt or leave the EU;(Upcoming elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany will perhaps provide an answer!)
- **Diplomatically** because the UK voice combined with that of the EU is mutually reinforcing. Again UK is likely to become less relevant as so many heads of government warned in the run up to the referendum.
- **Militarily** because of possible strains in NATO compounded by uncertainties surrounding Trump's commitment to the Alliance
- **Sociologically** because of the disinhibition which created a climate for the assassination of Jo Cox and the rise in hate speech and racially motivated crime.

As regards the future of the EU there are in broad terms two schools of thought:

1. Now is the time to push ahead with greater integration (particularly in terms of financial governance). Now is the time to move towards a more Federal Europe and take advantage of the disappearance of the negative Brits. But somehow I don't really see that happening because if you look North or if you look East there are just too many Eurosceptic (and in the East authoritarian and nationalistic) leaders in power.
2. The alternative which some will dismiss as playing into the hands of the Eurosceptics is to stand back and take stock of what has gone wrong. Why is Brussels so unpopular and so remote? What can be done to make Europe a positive asset rather than a burdensome, nitpicking, demanding bureaucracy? Somehow or other the EU must cease being perceived as imposing itself top down in order to become a listening and caring body which operates upwards from the grass roots. The one size fits all Europe no longer corresponds to the needs of ordinary people. The gulf between the English and the Scots is clear evidence of that fact. I suspect all the divisions the referendum in the UK has revealed are to be found to a greater or lesser extent in all the other EU countries.

Sadly Brexit is an example of Europe's fast disappearing solidarity!

Whatever happened to solidarity? Where are European values when EU member states bluntly refuse to accept refugees but have no qualms about receiving EU funds?

Where are European values when richer EU countries are unwilling to transfer even a small proportion of their wealth to less prosperous countries.

Where are European values when our governments close their eyes to human rights violations in the name of realpolitik and vested economic interests?

What will remain of Europe if its values continue to regress? After all, our shared values are not just the cement supposedly binding our countries together. They are also the mainstay of our European identity. Take away our values and we will just revert to being English, French, Greek or Dutch or whatever with our selfish inward-looking concerns. How can we prevent that happening?

The crisis of values is not just limited to the European Union. The European Court of Human Rights is coming under fire also from some unlikely places and a number of States are explicitly challenging its authority .

One of them is the United Kingdom! The UK is not only refusing to implement a Strasbourg Court ruling on prisoners' voting rights but it was until very recently seriously envisaging the possibility of denouncing the 1950 European Human Rights Convention, which, ironically, was actually in a large part drafted by English lawyers including Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (later Lord Kilmuir) who had been a prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials.

Theresa May, shortly after taking office, announced that the government would not seek to leave the ECHR but nobody seems to be convinced that as this idea has been shelved for good.

I would like to stand here tonight like Professor Pangloss and tell you all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.



Unfortunately I see Brexit as a bad omen for the immediate future of my country and for Europe. I hope I am proved wrong and perhaps some of you in this room will be able to tell me why.

In the longer term, I continue to believe, naively, that one day there will be a united Europe and that my country will be part of that grand design. But I fear it will not be tomorrow.!

Thank you for your attention