

Address given by Tony Blair on Poland's place in Europe (Warsaw, 30 May 2003)

Caption: On 30 May 2003, during an official visit to Poland, Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, emphasises the importance of the country's accession to the European Union and compares the situations of the United Kingdom and Poland.

Source: Tony Blair's message to Poland on joining the EU. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: European Commission, [29.04.2005]. Disponible sur http://europa.eu.int/constitution/futurum/documents/speech/sp300503_en.pdf.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_tony_blair_on_poland_s_place_in_europe_warsaw_30_may_2003-en-f358eeca-127f-40bf-abc7-ee7b4b4416f3.html

Publication date: 23/10/2012

Tony Blair's message to Poland on joining the EU (30 May 2003)

Mr President, Prime Ministers, Professor Szomberg, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a terrific honour to be here today, and in this fabulous setting. In many ways this is a symbol of Europe's past - glorious and tragic - and a symbol of Europe's future. The people of Poland have restored this castle as they have rebuilt their country after war and oppression. They have given us lessons and hope for the next century.

Poland is an extraordinary country; the Polish people are extraordinary people. Far beyond your frontiers, you are respected and admired.

You are admired for your fortitude, for your endurance of years of war, struggle, pain and bloodshed, the violation of Polish land and civilisation by successive dictatorships, and throughout all this misery, for never once allowing your travails to crush your spirit. You never stopped believing in freedom and fighting for it.

For us, Poland is an old friend in the new Europe now taking shape. There are 70,000 Poles in Britain. War memorials to the Polish dead grace our towns and villages. In the church where my family often hear Mass, there is every Sunday a Mass still said in Polish for the local Polish community.

We remember your heroism in World War Two. We recall the Polish pilots who fought and died over London to preserve Europe's freedom. We reflect on the officers and men who having fought valiantly to save Poland in 1939 and 1940, then came to Britain to enlist and carry on the fight. It was Churchill who said that of all the countries in Europe conquered by Hitler, it was only in Poland that no collaborator was found to work with the Nazis.

Alas, for Poland, even after the war was won, it was only 40 or more years later that true freedom came.

Today Poland stands tall, a proud nation and a free one, the history of tyranny over; a future in the new Europe awaiting. The Polish people face a choice of whether to join the European Union or not. Thirty years ago Britain faced the same choice.

Why join Europe?

So: here we are, two similar nations, who share many of the same instincts, have a common history and are now debating a common future. Why join Europe? And what sort of Europe are we joining?

It is asked by British Eurosceptics, what good has come out of Europe in the last 50 years? The question is bizarre and the answer is overwhelming - peace and prosperity. After centuries of wars in which millions died, Europe is at peace; and within the European Union there is now the largest economic single market in the world, with the living standards of people in Europe dramatically transformed for the better. Part of the impulse for the development of Europe has undoubtedly come from its unique and chequered history; and from a profound determination, after the carnage of two world wars, to build a different and better future.

But today an increasing part of this impulse comes from a recognition of the nature of the changing world around us. It is the reason why Europe has not only to continue to develop; but also to change itself. For its first half century, Europe was essentially introspective and obviously so, as it created the new institutions and the economic integration to give effect to the vision of a Europe at peace. But now it is confronting a much greater and broader challenge that has to turn it outward: the challenge of globalisation. Everywhere, every nation, every region, is finding its economy, security, even culture turned upside down by globalisation. The security challenge for Europe is external. The economic challenge is no longer within Europe but in competition with the other economies of the world, developed and developing. Mass communication and radical innovation in technology makes the pace of change fast, furious, exhilarating and intimidating.

The USA is today the world's only superpower. But the sheer size and, increasingly, the economic strength of China and India will make them formidable powers, as will the natural resources and geography of Russia.

Europe's preoccupation can therefore no longer be solely within Europe but must be about Europe's place in the world. And the reasons for European Union are reasons no longer simply to do with putting peace in place of conflict, but to do with the vital national and strategic interests of the countries that make up Europe, in facing the new challenges - economic or political - of the outside world. The purpose of the European Union is to give us, the individual nations that form it, greater economic and political strength. For the 19th Century and part of the 20th Century Europe was the point where most of the world's vital decisions were taken. Today at best we share that role. My passionate belief in Europe is not born of any diminishing of my belief in Britain. On the contrary, I believe in Europe because I believe membership of the European strategic alliance is a crucial part of the British national interest. Anti-Europeanism is not British patriotism. It is an out of date delusion.

The opportunities and challenges

For Poland I believe it is the same. Europe is not a threat. It is your opportunity. Staying out is not a sign of Polish strength. It would lead to Polish weakness. In the era of globalisation, nations like ours need to come together as allies and fashion the new Europe for our and others' national interest. To make it outward, not inward; to make it economically effective, not economically feeble; to use Europe to make our voice heard louder and stronger in the world.

In the course of our European membership, there will be difficulties, compromises, agonising and frustrating negotiation. But the prize of being part of a huge economic market and a powerful political union is worth a few late nights in Brussels. The disappointments are irritating. But the benefits are historic provided that the same vision and courage that gave birth to the European Union now re-shapes and reforms it to withstand and then harness the force of globalisation.

So what sort of Europe do we want? What sort of Europe can take on this challenge of the modern world?

A union of nations, not a federal superstate

First we want a union of nations, not a federal superstate, and that vision is shared by the majority of countries and people in Europe. A European superstate would neither have the efficacy or legitimacy to meet the global challenge.

The European Convention under President Giscard d'Estaing is coming to an end. There will then be many months of an intergovernmental Conference. We have insisted on Poland's right to be fully involved in this negotiation and you will continue to be so. The reason for changing Europe's rules is simple. With 15 countries in the European Union, the present rules are an obstacle to Europe's progress. At 25, then 27, possibly 30, the present system would produce paralysis, rather than progress. But a more effective Europe does not mean just more power to Brussels. In particular, I reject the notion that the "true" Europe is to be found only in the European Commission and European Parliament. The European Union is a balance between the community and the intergovernmental. What we need to do is to strengthen Europe where necessary at every level; but the fount of authority lies in the free will of nations, collectively expressed.

There are some in Britain who want the outcome of the Convention to be subject to a referendum. I note that though you here in Poland are having a referendum on membership of the European Union you are not having one on the Convention. Likewise, for us, if we recommend entry to the Euro, it would be a step of such economic, and constitutional significance that a referendum would be sensible, and right, which is why we have promised one.

If the Convention or IGC represented a fundamental change to the British Constitution and to our system of parliamentary democracy, there would be a case for a referendum. But it doesn't. The truth is the argument,

advanced by both our countries, against a European superstate, is being won. Foreign and defence policy remains with governments and subject to unanimity. The argument that Britain or Poland could not in the future support military action in Iraq without Europe's permission is completely untrue. Tax rates will and should remain, as now, the prerogative of the British Parliament. Treaty changes will be by unanimity. Economic policy should and will be co-ordinated between governments. The frights and terrors about Europe designed to spook us - the end of a thousand years of British history, absurd stories that we'll lose the proceeds of North Sea oil, we'll lose our seat on the UNSC, we'll lose two million jobs, we'll be forced to drive on the right - these are just the latest in a long and undistinguished line of such propaganda, trotted out at every step of European integration and whose real purpose is to provide the basis for British withdrawal from Europe. That would be a disaster for British jobs, for British industry and for British influence.

It would also be a signal failure of self-confidence. Indeed, this anti-Europeanism, and these more outlandish manifestations, is itself a symptom not of national pride but a lack of confidence about just how strong Britain can and should be. Britain and Poland can win in Europe. But we can't do it standing on the touchline. In particular as Europe co-operates more, indeed as the whole world moves closer together, there is all the more need to root the European vision in the identity of the nations that make up Europe. That is why I also welcome, for the first time, the involvement of national Parliaments in Europe's decision-making and in the strengthening of the European Council with a full-time Chairman. A Council whose Chairman was rotating every six months cannot, in a Union of 25, provide the continuity and direction Europe and its nations need. A weak Council and a strong Europe are a contradiction in terms. We need, of course, also a powerful Commission able, where competences are conferred, to execute them with vigour and impartiality. But the roles of the two are different. Both are necessary for Europe to work. This is not a debate about big versus small nations; but about an effective versus an ineffective Europe.

Our vision of Europe is one where all countries - big or small, old members or new - are equal.

The date of membership is irrelevant. Every country has a contribution to make. It would be wrong to view enlargement as "you new countries" joining "our club". It is up to us the current members to demonstrate to the accession countries that this is their club too. The Weimar Triangle is an excellent example of this - extending our traditional partnerships in a spirit of friendship and equality.

Economic reform and globalisation

Secondly, the Europe we want is one that is ready to reform economically to meet the challenge of globalisation. This is the vital significance of the Lisbon agenda.

We compete today in the markets of the world. We must not allow the argument about Europe's economy to become a false and sterile debate between 'social' Europe and 'flexible' Europe. There must be a social dimension to Europe. But a social dimension that makes Europe's economies rigid, simply makes their people unemployed. A social dimension today is not only about basic employment protection, though that is important, but also about training and retraining, skills and education and not only through school but throughout life. That is essential in the global economy of the 21st century.

Look around the world and those countries that are gaining ground are those investing in human capital, reforming their welfare state, encouraging small enterprises, stimulating scientific research and innovation and making themselves flexible enough and adaptable enough to change as the world changes around them.

Europe has to follow suit. It is no use competing only amongst ourselves. We must be able to compete globally. We must pursue the liberalisation of energy, telecommunications and other sectors. We must complete the single European market. We must throw open our markets to the world by leading not following at the WTO round. When we see the huge changes Poland has made to its economy, with all the tumult that has accompanied them, we see both that it is possible to change, if the political will is there, and that it is ultimately to our benefit to do so. The European Union is doing the same, with the Lisbon process helping create jobs and prosperity, and I for one would welcome a like-minded reforming government like yours to help take this process forward.

EU defence and NATO

Thirdly, we want a Europe capable of sharing the burden of defending our way of life and freedom but doing so in a way fully consistent with our membership of NATO.

NATO will continue to be the bedrock of our defence, in Britain as in Poland. That is why together we have been putting forward plans to reform it so that it can do the different tasks asked of it today. But we need a vastly improved European defence capability so that we can play our part better in NATO and also where NATO chooses not to be engaged, to undertake actions in our own right. At long last, European defence is underway in Macedonia. In time, provided we build up our capability and do not get diverted into institutional wrangles that will divide Europe just as it wants to unite, European defence can do more and I welcome that. Again this is an area where Britain and Poland enjoy a good and productive relationship which we can deepen.

The transatlantic alliance

Fourth, we both want a Europe dedicated to upholding the transatlantic alliance.

We regard the United States as our allies and partners. We are proud of what we have achieved together against tyranny and in defence of freedom, most recently in Iraq. Let me speak frankly about the dilemma Europe faces over the United States. You know the value of the American alliance. When you welcome President Bush tomorrow you welcome him as President of a country that stood by you in your years of Soviet repression, that was a beacon of freedom amidst the darkness of the police state.

Because for you and other Central and Eastern European nations, your experiences are so vivid and recent, your attachment to the alliance is strong. But deep down all of Europe knows its importance.

However, there is a dilemma. For you, the twin goals, which are motivating your country, lifting its people's sights, are membership of NATO and the European Union - one about the alliance with the United States, one about the union with Europe. You, like us, desperately wish them not to be in conflict; because both are necessary for your future peace and prosperity as they are for ours. And in the past months, there has been division between Europe and the United States. There's no disguising it. And even for those of us who have supported the United States and believe passionately in that support, it has divided our nations.

Now is a crucial time. It is a moment either for reconciliation or for drifting apart. On the flight from Kuwait here I read Robert Kagan's short book "Paradise and Power" in which he argues that Europe and the United States are destined to go their separate ways. Europe, he argues, is content to let the United States shoulder the burden of policing the world, is resigned to its comfortable life, is mildly repelled at military prowess and wants to live in a rules-based world of perpetual negotiation in lieu of action. The United States, by contrast, is the world's "sheriff", is happy to be so and has no patience with European flabbiness.

This is an arresting thesis but like many arresting theses, it describes one notion as if it were the only truth whereas actually it is a competing notion with others equally true.

Britain and Poland, along with many others in Europe supported action in Iraq; and in our case fought in Iraq. We are happy to help shoulder the burden. But to be fair, so did France and Germany support the action in Afghanistan; and in Kosovo. France may have disagreed with what we did in Iraq; but it is at the forefront of those wanting to build up European defence capability. It is not against using force; but was against this particular use of force.

The real question is: can we recognise a sufficient convergence of interest to rebuild this transatlantic alliance and strengthen it? I believe we can. In truth, Europe should be and is concerned with the issues of WMD in the hands of unstable states and international terrorism. These are the modern security threats; they threaten Europe as much as the United States; and the United States is not wrong but right to be tough in

dealing with them. We must support the United States in this and where in Europe there is disagreement with the United States, we should manage the disagreement carefully as between allies not let explode it into a diplomatic dogfight.

The United States, in turn, can recognise that the European dilemma is that of wanting to be America's partner not its servant. Part of Europe believes the only alternatives are subservience or rivalry. Yet just in the past few weeks, the United States has reached out a long way to recognise the concerns of others. In the United Nations we have come back together. In the Middle East the United States has championed agreement on the roadmap, the product of work by the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia. Last week, President Bush delivered a major boost to tackling HIV/AIDS and poverty in Africa and the developing world. All of this shows the European Union and the United States on the same agenda. So let us not give up on it. It's in no-one's interests to do so and I remain convinced of the vitality of the transatlantic alliance and determined to fight for it.

Winning the debate

Which brings me to my final point. There is a fight to be fought in Europe. In all these issues, there are different and competing strains of thought. Surely that is not the least surprising in a Europe of different nations, each with its own history, culture and identity. There are those who believe with total sincerity that a federal European state is a good thing; that by governing through one European Commission, legislating through one European Parliament, the weakness of some nations and the strength of others is flattened out, made more equitable. There are those who fear a more liberal European economy, a more flexible workforce, spells the end of social justice, is an affront to solidarity. There are those who believe the USA is fundamentally, culturally and politically different to Europe, is hellbent on hegemony and we should distance ourselves.

These are not the points of view of evil people. They are perfectly decent, well motivated people with whom we happen to disagree. And they represent one part of the European debate and that debate continues.

When Poland, as with Britain becomes part of the European Union that debate then affects you directly. But let me advise you as a friend to avoid the mistake of British foreign policy towards Europe for around half a century. That mistake is to think that by hanging back in Europe we can avoid the debate; that if we participate we get contaminated by the contrary arguments. In truth, we are in the debate anyway. Europe affects us, in or out. Economically, we are integrated with Europe. Politically, it is absurd to think Europe's decisions do not affect us.

For Poland as with Britain, our strategy should be: get in it, make the most of it, have the confidence to win the debate not be frightened by it. Do we believe that the Europe our people want is a Europe of nations not a federal superstate? Yes. Do we believe Europe must reform economically to succeed? Yes. Do we believe Europe and the USA should be allies? Yes. Are our arguments good ones? Yes. Can we win the debate? It's up to us. But great nations don't hide away or follow along, stragglers at the back. They lead. They win. They have the confidence that comes not from arrogance but from a true understanding of the modern world.

The belief that Europe is something done to us, that everyone else spends their time ganging up on us, to do us down, is a belief fit for a nation with an inferiority complex not a proud nation that knows it can win and has proven its courage and its confidence by its record in history.

Conclusion

So: you in Poland, we in Britain are once again contemplating our future in Europe.

The worries that our people have about Europe are the same. Let us overcome them together. Nobody can be sure what the 21st century holds. But one characteristic is already clear. It will be dominated by the scale and pace of technological and economic change. Conflicts in one region will swiftly bear their consequences across the globe. Tremors in one large financial market reverberate with immediacy in every market.

Interdependence defines our time. If this is so, how can any nation, in an unprejudiced obedience to its national interest, lose the opportunity of participating in the world's biggest economic and political union? Cutting ties with Europe is to engage in self-mutilation. And if the ties remain, make the most of them. For Britain and Poland the lesson is the same: accept the European Union as a modern reality, join it wholeheartedly, fight to make it, economically and politically, an instrument of future strength and prosperity for the nations within it. History and progress were with you in lifting the Communist yoke; they were with us both in defeating the Nazi tyranny; they are with us now in helping shape and build a common European destiny.