

# **‘Britain in Europe – a post-war summary’**

**We are indebted to Professor Alan Sked for his summary account of Britain’s uneasy post-war relationship with Europe, which we publish in full below.**

It is said that those who refuse to learn from the mistakes of the past are bound to repeat them.

Yet even now commentators stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the fundamental differences between the Anglo-Saxon and European political traditions which eventually played themselves out via the 2016 Referendum and the vote to leave the European Union.

It is only through an understanding of our respective historical traditions that we can begin to make sense of what has happened and work out how we proceed from here.

Be in no doubt. The opportunities now open to the UK are enormous. It remains to be seen whether those in charge are bold enough to take them.

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## **BRITAIN, EUROPE AND WHY WE WERE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE EU**

**By Professor Alan Sked**

BRITAIN’S TRADITIONAL ROLE in Europe was to spearhead coalitions against European kings, emperors and dictators who sought to dominate the continent or unify it by force – Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler to be precise. We also

played a leading role in NATO resisting Stalin and the USSR.

Moreover, Britain was really the only European power able to do this since at the height of the Cold War France was distracted and defeated, fighting bitter colonial wars in Vietnam and Algeria, while Germany was disarmed and divided. Then under de Gaulle, France became the enemy of the 'Anglo-Saxons' while Germany after rearmament became obsessed with *Ostpolitik* or being nice to the Soviets. Britain alone stood for the robust defence of the West – along with Canada and the United States.

This all seems fairly obvious in hindsight yet today our record is disparaged. Commentators obsess instead with empire and the EU. Our history is seen as one of oppression and failure.

### ***Britain's post-war decline & entry to the EC***

In particular the economic problems we faced in the 1960s and 1970s – high overseas defence expenditure (including support of the British Army of the Rhine) and trade union militancy – are seen to have rightly given rise to a desire to enter the EEC, despite the fact that the EEC had no means whatsoever of solving these problems.

None the less the Tory and Liberal Parties pushed for membership of the EEC. Douglas Hurd signed the Conservatives up to become a secret corporate member of Monnet's Action Committee for a United States of Europe for £15,000 a year, while Lord Gladwyn, President of the Liberal Party, as British Ambassador to France wrote to Macmillan during our first bid for membership expressing the hope that inside a federal Europe, we would 'ultimately not even have the limited autonomy of a Texas.'

De Gaulle prevented Macmillan taking us in but Pompidou,

worried by the rising influence of Brandt's West Germany, accepted British membership in 1972, albeit at the price of our abandoning all our negotiating demands. Our government even offered up our fishing resources as a bribe to let us in. The motto laid down in negotiations by Sir Con O'Neil, our chief negotiator was 'Swallow the lot...swallow it now!' Less the diplomacy of a Metternich or Bismarck. More that of a Monika Lewinsky.

### ***The misery of membership***

Britain remained a member from 1973 till 2020. Sir Geoffrey Howe ensured we did what we were told by turning all EEC directives and regulations into delegated statutory instruments which had to be rubber-stamped by government and Parliament which could neither reject nor even debate them. Its sovereignty was now emasculated. The Tories had surrendered to Brussels.

During those 43 years of membership we experienced no gains, merely losses – an annual membership contribution which eventually ballooned to £20 billion gross; the destruction of our fishing fleet, fishing grounds and fishing communities; a CAP that brought higher food prices, beef mountains and wine lakes, and high subsidies to rich agro-barons and large estate owners. (Agriculture still takes up 38% of the EU budget.)

Fortunately we escaped adopting the euro with the result that between 1997 and 2017, the British economy grew 44% while that of the Eurozone managed only 26%. The euro, of course, proved a disaster, failing both to increase trade between member states and to replace the dollar as the world's reserve currency. Its mismanagement also led to a long depression in Greece and to bailouts in several other countries.

## ***Brexit and its aftermath***

Brexit – our exit from the EU after the largest democratic vote in British history – was thus a totally rational decision to take back control of our sovereignty and policy-making and become a normal self-governing democracy, no longer run by an unaccountable foreign bureaucracy, aided by a Council of Ministers working by secret majority votes and abetted by a token Parliament.

Yet there was global astonishment that a free people could reject the advice of its Europeanised elites. Ordinary voters were stigmatised as racists and illiterates. Yet, on the contrary, they just wanted to run their own affairs like Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians, Americans, Indians, Swiss or Norwegians. But international and British elites never forgave them as Theresa May's failed premiership proved.

The timing of Brexit was also unlucky. Almost as soon as we had signed our exit treaty in 2020, the country was hit first by the Covid Pandemic and then by Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Both events had huge economic consequences (Brexit in contrast was a diplomatic/constitutional settlement plus a status quo free trade treaty.) The first closed down the British economy for large periods of time and paid billions to people to stay at home. The second disrupted energy supplies and supply chains throughout the West. Yet the international liberal elite blames Brexit for the economic consequences of Covid and Putin.

### ***'The right decision'***

However, an econometric analysis of the effect of these events on the economies of all members of OECD by Professor Patrick Minford shows that Brexit 'had no deleterious effect' on the British economy. Likewise, a recent study by the leading French bank, Paribas, has shown that 'Brexit has made no

difference'. Today the IMF forecasts that Britain will grow faster than Germany, France and Italy.

The BBC has recently shown that food prices in France, Italy and Spain are higher than in Britain. And whereas the Hauliers Association has said that its shortage of drivers has been cured by higher wages, ETOA, the European tourism association, has warned all tourists against closures of bars, restaurants and hotels across the continent due to staff shortages as a result of Covid.

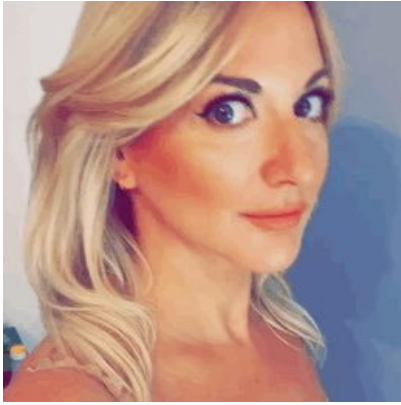
Brexit has shown itself at its best in Britain's significant foreign policy achievements, since 2020 – its leading role in shoring up support for Ukraine; the AUKUS Pact with the USA and Australia; the security treaties with Sweden and Finland, the 90 Free Trade Agreements around the globe, including one with Japan and membership of the CPTPP.

The pity is that Johnson's and Sunak's governments have failed to take the opportunity to deregulate the economy, lower taxes, and get rid of remaining EU laws as many wished and expected. The danger is that Starmer as prime minister may seek to re-join the EU, whatever the cost. That would be a historical disaster for whom the Tories would also be to blame. I feel sure, however, that the British people would never allow it to happen.

History shows that Brexit was the right choice in 2016 and still is.

By Alan Sked, Emeritus Professor of International History at  
the London School of Economics, 29/06/23

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## **‘The Independence Documentary’**

Together with our partners at CIBUK.Org, we’ve organised a TV-style documentary with a stellar line-up of well-known politicians and all kinds of interesting people, young and old, men and women, white and ethnic origin, presented by Alexandra Phillips. Alex will be known to many readers as an ex-GB News presenter and a frequent sight on everything from Question Time to Talk TV. We have finished filming – now we have the long task of editing, if we can get some extra funding. This is going to be big!

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**About the author:** *Alan Sked was educated at Allan Glen’s School in Glasgow, before going on to study Modern and Medieval History at the University of Glasgow, followed by a DPhil in Modern History at Merton College, Oxford. Sked taught at the London School of Economics where he became a leading authority on the history of the Hapsburg Empire, also teaching US and modern intellectual history and the history of sex, race and slavery. Alan Sked is now Emeritus Professor of International History at the London School of Economics. @profsked*

The original article can be found [here](#).

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