



WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

ALASTAIR JAMES

AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSMAN

I am a European businessman. I work for a large international management consultancy firm. Over the last two years I have worked on projects based in various European countries: in Germany, for seven months so far, with at least another year to go; in France, for seven months; in Macedonia for two weeks; in Scotland¹ for three months; and in Norway for three months. At times during those projects, I have had occasion to visit my clients' operations and my firm's offices in Italy, Spain, the Czech republic, England and Wales. For the purposes of giving and receiving training, attending firm meetings, and making sales presentations, I have also spent time in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Austria, Hungary and Greece. I know colleagues who are, or have been, working abroad on projects in Switzerland, Poland, Luxembourg, Russia and Azerbaijan.

I am a European businessman. But I am also a global businessman. For elements of the above mentioned projects and for firm meetings, training and internal firm development projects, I have spent time in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Three years ago I spent seven months living and working in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

On this latter Atlanta based project, there worked people who lived in Atlanta itself, in San Francisco, New York, Austin, Houston, Cleveland, Portland OR, Toronto, Tokyo and London. After I finished on the project, other people worked on it who came from many other American cities, from France and from Germany. While working on the project, I had meetings or delivered training in San Francisco, Denver, Minneapolis, Dallas, Houston, Cincinnati, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. This is the typical way our firm runs projects in its North American region. A project is based in some US city. The firm's best available people from across the US and Canada are chosen to work on the project. They fly in on a Monday morning, stay in hotels during the week and fly home again on Thursday night. The same approach is used by all the other major consultancies.

In our Europe/Africa region we use exactly the same approach. Working with me on my European based projects, I have had fellow team members from our offices in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the Czech republic, Slovakia, the US and South Africa. Those of us living in Europe fly in on a Monday morning, or for London/Paris take the train, stay in hotels during the week and fly home on a Thursday night, just as in the US.

DAY TO DAY REALITY OF THE SINGLE MARKET

On my current project in Germany one of my team members is a Turk married to an Italian and living in Germany, one a Dutch woman who lives in Germany, one a Dutchman who lives in Chicago, one a Slovak living in the Czech republic, and one a German living in France, who I

am told now speaks German with a slight French accent. On my previous project in France I also worked with team members from my client who included an Irishman, married to a Spaniard and living in France, a German who lives in Germany just across the French border and commutes to Paris each week, four Irish women living in France, an Englishman living in France and a German woman living with a Frenchman in Paris.

Once international business travel was mostly the preserve of executives and international buyers and salesmen. As multinational companies across Europe work to integrate their businesses — one of my firm's primary sources of business today — more and more junior staff are having the experience of working on multi-national teams and travelling regularly to live and work in other European countries. There are fifty people from my current client's units across Europe who are working on my project in Düsseldorf. They come from all departments: sales, purchasing, inventory management, manufacturing, finance and information systems. These are ordinary middle class people with reasonable jobs. They are not high-flying global entrepreneurs. Only one of them has worked outside his home country or on a multi-national team before.

They find that we all talk about football, especially the European championships and the World Cup qualifiers; that we listen to the same music on MTV, even if the presenters speak in German; that German pilsner and wheat beer is excellent, though the Czech stuff is even better (our Czech colleagues bring some every week and put it in the project fridge), but that many of the British still prefer their bitter to German alt beer; that German cooking has the distinction of being worse than English, but that thankfully Düsseldorf is a cosmopolitan city and if we want a taste of home we can go down one of the three Irish pubs or the Indian, and the French can go to some of the excellent French and Vietnamese restaurants. We also find that the Germans do have a sense of humour and it's rather a lot like ours!

My colleagues from continental Europe are all bilingual — English is the multi-national business language of Europe. You cannot get a job in my firm on the continent if you don't speak some English. You will not be able to rise to senior management positions in most large European companies if you don't speak English. A very significant proportion of my colleagues are tri-lingual and non-trivial numbers are quadri-lingual or even penta-lingual. As a typical Englishman, speaking merely a smattering of French, certainly not well enough for business use, I feel somewhat inadequate when mixing with these polyglots. As our firm continues to integrate over the next decade I expect that unless I improve my linguistic ability, it will have a limiting effect on my career.

EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN CULTURES

Having spent a very significant proportion of my time in Europe and north America I find, as an Englishman, that the culture, life-style, and values of Britain are much closer to those of continental Western Europe than they are to those of the US. Despite the superficial ties of language I find North America a much more foreign place than continental Europe. I find these ties of European culture particularly pronounced in northern Western Europe: Ireland, Flemish Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and the Scandinavian countries (including interestingly, and admittedly based on what little I saw in the week I spent there, Estonia).

What do I find common, or similar with these cultures that I find contrasts with that of the US? The sense of history, of deeply rooted, embedded culture; the vibrancy and distinctive individual identities of crowded ancient cities laid out before the invention of the motor car; the cynicism; the French sense of humour and irony; Germans going down the brauhaus; stronger green values, perhaps brought about by the much greater population density; the more equal societies; the relative religious scepticism or indifference — particularly amongst the educated; the less violent societies; most of all, the much greater cosmopolitanism and internationalism.

I also find Eastern Europe clearly a part of the overall European culture. It just has a feeling of having been locked up in a box for forty years and allowed to fall to bits. The speed with which culturally it is rejoining Western Europe is astonishing. The twenty-something Czechs on my project fit in perfectly with those of us from the West. They understand and enjoy Western values and life-styles clearly and enthusiastically.

Having said that, I also find that I have much more in common with professionals from all the countries I have visited than I do with uneducated, or unintelligent people from Britain. Some of my readers will note that the opinions and values I've described are more likely to be those of the educated, not the European masses. They, just like our

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

English masses, I'm sure contain as large a proportion of bigoted and intolerant individuals as do the American masses. That's a problem with masses, not Europeans.

Of course there are strong cultural similarities between Britain and its ex-colonies, but let us not overstate these. There is a big difference between the descendants of people who left their homelands to travel half-way round the world and conquer new lands in extremely harsh circumstances and those who stayed at home. Let us not forget the French influence in Canada, the Dutch influence in South Africa. Let us not forget that German came within four votes of being the official language of the United States. The influence of German culture on that of the US is often under-appreciated by people who just visit the place occasionally for holidays.

SENSE OF IDENTITY

If I think about my own sense of belonging to geographical, ethnic or cultural groups I would say that I think of myself, in this order, firstly as Southern English, secondly as European, thirdly as part of Western Civilisation, and finally as part of the Global village.

Southern English? Another of the things I enjoy about Europe, compared with North America, is the density of variety of cultures and identities. While identifying myself as a European, I also get great pleasure in the sense of difference that Scots, Bavarians, Catalans, Flems or "Padanians" have within their larger national groups. I am very pleased that people take pride in being Scottish or Catalan and enjoy meeting these people and learning about what they perceive as their unique flavours in the overarching menu of western civilisation.

THE NATURE OF MY LIBERTARIANISM

What I have said so far probably would sit quite comfortably in the LA's Cultural Notes series, and I suspect that much of my audience won't disagree with it. But, perhaps, some of my libertarian readers are thinking that this has nothing to do with whether or not one should support the political institution of the European Union. Many of them are probably thinking that a libertarian order across Europe will allow us to enjoy this diversity and history unfettered, that it would allow each of us to feel whatever sense of group belonging we feel comes naturally to each of us.

At this point I have to digress to describe briefly the nature of my libertarianism. I think of myself as a moderate libertarian. I am not of the opinion that Government is intrinsically an evil. Within the Western liberal democracies there are many parliamentarians and Government officials who are self-serving and corrupt, a few with a genuine thirst for controlling power and many who are quite sincere in what they want to achieve through politics. Modern democratic politics is more often ignorant than it is evil.

The positive conception of democratic politics and government, for example as imagined by the British Liberal Democrat party, is based on a number of key misunderstandings about the nature of change, about spontaneously emerging order, about the ability of a smoothly operating market to control, and even help us benefit from, self-serving behaviours, in a way which government never can. A positive belief in the benefits of democratic politics is based on errors: in psychology about human morality and ethics; in mathematics about the ability to predict, and hence direct, complex situations, and about the likelihood of naturally self-regulated order. Nevertheless that does not make it evil. A strong belief in libertarian anarchy is also characterised by opposite, but still incorrect, views about similar things: about people's ability to behave rationally in their own interest; in the ability of the market to balance competing demands in all circumstances.

Of course, I believe that there should be less government, that in many social areas government intervenes in areas where it has neither right nor need and that it misunderstands fundamental economic forces and how they will drive out the ends we all seek. What I am not prepared to admit is that all government is necessarily wrong and I am certainly not prepared to say that all supporters of Government are such for immoral reasons. We cannot be sure how stable a libertarian, anarchic society would be, especially under the influence of different cultural and artistic ideas. Much of people's perceived need for Government stems, at heart, from a wish to manage this uncertainty, to guard against the collapse back into destructive and corrupt anarchy. For most people anarchy is a pejorative term, and for good reason. Steps towards libertarianism are like steps across a mine field in a bog, very tentative to ensure that we will not be blown sky high nor swallowed by the morass. How dangerous is subversive literature or poor education to the maintenance of the general predisposition towards co-operative behaviour which must underpin a lightly regulated society? A

very legitimate type of question which we cannot answer with certainty, and which we cannot dismiss lightly.

PRACTICAL POLITICS REMAINS A NECESSITY

As a result of the nature of this evolutionary process towards freedom, I do not anticipate the wholesale realisation of any libertarian dreams in the near future. I expect government to be with us for some while yet, at least for my life-time. I am not prepared to abandon thinking about practical politics altogether, for the sanctuary of some intellectually satisfying but unrealisable fantasy.

Yes, of course, I most certainly hope we will move in a more libertarian direction, that we will inch further into the swamp of uncertainty, towards the productive edge of chaos, not crawl back to the safety of some sub-optimal piece of firm ground behind us.

MY VISION FOR EUROPE

So is the European Union a force for liberty or a force for repression?

Well firstly, I would ask the libertarians reading this to bear in mind that even if government holds no legitimate place for them, it does for most people. It has a lot of symbolic value as well as practical effects. For many people government and cultural identity are closely entwined. From the point of view of my personal cultural feelings and sense of identity which I described earlier, I have a gut liking for the concept of a Europe of regions. I can imagine with some pleasure a structure of an overall European political entity sitting above a federation of strongly independent regions, most of them smaller than the nation states of today.

Those smaller entities would share useful, mutually beneficial things, such as totally free movement of goods, services and people (I support our immediate joining of the Schengen agreement); a single currency supported by an independent central bank with a constitutional duty to maintain the value of that currency; a fundamental protection of basic human rights; pan-European company law, making it possible to incorporate on a European basis; and independent super-national (or rather super-regional) competition authorities.

These regions would maintain independence on tax raising issues, on the provision (whether state or private) of education, health, welfare and other social services, of transport infrastructure, and of law and order. Defence I would in principle share. However, to make this work there would need to be sufficient alignment of opinion between the regions as to the correct level of spending and defence objectives. Since the collapse of the unambiguous threat of communism, it may be some time until such alignment is reached. Nevertheless the success of NATO has shown that when Europeans do recognise their shared interests and common objectives they are able to co-operate effectively.

THE SINGLE MARKET

I think that the European Union has been enormously effective in creating the single market, given the realities of the political situation in most member states. If the coming liberalisations of telecommunications, air travel, utilities and even postal services are successful I think this will be almost entirely due to the efforts of the EU. I do not believe they could have been achieved as quickly between states still completely independent. The European competition commissioner is working hard to try and reduce the level of subsidy that the French and German governments, in particular, give to their industries. The euro stability pact will encourage restraint in public spending, and with many European countries struggling to keep up with pension, health, education and welfare costs, so called "corporate welfare" is likely to be a relatively easy first target for cuts.

BUILDING DEMOCRACY TO THE EAST

I think that the EU has also been effective in cementing democracy in Spain, Portugal and Greece, and I strongly support its rapid expansion into central Europe. I also think that a major policy failure at the moment is the absence of a constructive plan for the eventual accession of Turkey to the union. The benefits to Europe, and western civilisation as a whole, of building a stable democratic secular state in a culturally Muslim country are enormous, and if Greece cannot see that, well then Greece's continued membership provides no strategic benefits at all as far as I can see.

Germany's unofficial statements that Turkey will never be a member are ill-judged, but are also a helpful pointer to the fact that Germany is not quite as committed to the Union as Herr Kohl would like to pretend and the Euro-sceptics try to imply. Even more short-sighted is the recent decision to relegate Turkey's accession negotiations to a third class status, behind even Romania and Bulgaria, countries with considerably lower GDPs per head and arguably poorer democratic

credentials. Fortunately, Turkey has reacted in restrained manner and hopefully this decision can be reversed before irreparable damage is done. In the longer term we should also be looking to bring in Russia and other ex-members of the Soviet Union.

The prospect of EU membership has helped central European countries to implement modern financial and business laws and regulations, and eventual membership should help to cut out much of the ludicrous bureaucracy that still remains there. Expansion to the east is not only an extremely important end in itself, but it will also make the Common Agricultural Policy completely untenable and bring its wholesale reform closer. Germany has for some time now been chafing at the size of its contribution to the EU budget and rumour has it that after the German elections next year, German support for the CAP may decline noticeably.

THE SINGLE CURRENCY

I understand why some libertarians favour free banking over a single European currency, but given that there is no imminent prospect of free banking in this country or elsewhere, I do not understand why they often believe that a single currency has no benefits over the current arrangements. Apart from removing the transaction costs and inconvenience of multiple currencies, which I feel very personally every week, I see a number of more significant benefits.

Inflation rates across Europe are currently very low, at least by the standards of this century, and the single currency offers a chance to lock this low level in. The European Central Bank is being founded with one of the world's most independent constitutions, despite the best efforts of the French, and a clear responsibility to maintain the value of the currency. Once established, and as long as political power in the EU continues to be dispersed across the nation states, I believe it will prove very difficult to build a coalition of forces powerful enough to overturn that constitution and allow the bank to adopt a more lax monetary regime.

As I will shortly explain further, I see no speedy prospect for a strongly centralised European state, and if such a thing should ever come into being I expect that by that time the European Central Bank will have developed a reputation similar to that of the Bundesbank. I also expect the people of Europe to have come to value the benefits of prolonged low inflation and to be as reluctant to lose them as the German people are today to lose the Deutschemark.

Any alternative suggestion of a return to the gold standard is undermined by the fact that nobody uses that standard today and, as a result, gold has decidedly not been a store of value over the last ten years. Major institutions which hold gold today are likely to release it onto world markets over the next decade, depressing the price ever further. At this time we have no option but to make state central banking work properly and the single currency offers the opportunity for all the European nations to benefit from the proven best practice of the Bundesbank.

TAX HARMONISATION

Finally, in praise of the single currency, there is a body of opinion within the Union which sees the next major project as the harmonisation of tax rates. This is not a liberal measure. It clearly has no benefit in the creation of the single market. This was not true of the efforts at product and service regulation harmonisation which was the core of the creation of the single market. While I would have preferred a policy of mutual recognition of all existing regulations, I accept that this was politically impossible, and the harmonisation of regulations did succeed in removing a lot of non-tariff barriers which were being used to hamper free trade within the EU.

This argument does not hold with tax harmonisation. No matter how its proponents present it, tax harmonisation is an attempt to stop tax competition between member states, something that even the highly politically centralised USA does not feel the need to do. Naturally, as a moderate libertarian I see tax competition as highly desirable. However if we have a single currency, and therefore a single monetary policy within the Union, then, given the continuing wide disparities between member states economies, it is going to be extremely difficult to adopt a single tax regime and hence a single fiscal policy. Given the ongoing difficulties in swinging public opinion behind the single currency I see little prospect of the Union putting in place a further measure which would make it virtually impossible to reduce the high unemployment rates on the continent. If we can also bring in the even poorer countries from the East this argument gains even more weight.

Yves-Thibault de Silguy, the commissioner in charge of the euro, was quoted, in *The Economist* of October 11th, as saying that "The people who hope that the euro means the end of Thatcherism in Europe have

got it precisely backwards." In the same issue another EU official pointed out that "It is flexibility in the exchange rate, not the reverse, that makes inflexibility in labour and product markets possible."

Of course we should wait to join the single currency until some time when our business cycle is more closely in step with that of the rest of the continent, but I cannot believe that there are libertarians who would support the argument that we must maintain "sovereignty" over our currency, i.e. the right to conduct monetary policy. I don't presume any of us think we should be trying to do Keynesian fine tuning at all. What we want from our currency is for it to be a stable store of value, nothing more. If the European Central Bank can come close to providing that, then that is all to the good.

A HIGHLY CENTRALISED STATE?

So am I in favour of greater political union? Of the creation of the European super state? Of course not, but then I also see little prospect of this coming into being. As a libertarian I am against all highly centralised states. And a European super state is unlikely to have the mitigating characteristic of being very democratic. I hope for as wide a Union as possible, and I cannot imagine how unitary democracy could work in a "nation" of twenty odd languages. Rather, I support greater regional autonomy within a framework guaranteeing basic rights and economic freedoms. I cannot imagine the French, the Spanish or the Germans giving up their political rights any more than I can imagine the British doing it. Chancellor Kohl is an increasingly lonely figure in his support for a strong political union, with support mainly from some of the smaller countries who already feel dominated by the big players and so have relatively little to lose. Yet even relatively small Denmark is a strong resistor of too much political integration. I cannot imagine the people of Europe giving up their political freedoms to a distant bureaucracy.

EURO-SCEPTIC FEARS

In his introduction to *The Euro-Sceptical Directory*,² the Libertarian Alliance's director, Chris Tame, claims that

... there has been an increasing shift in Euro-sceptic opinion from the hope that the increasingly statist and illiberal character of the EU could be reformed to the view that the European-project is now irrevocably flawed and inherently statist, and that total withdrawal is the only option.

He goes on to argue that

The idea that the core of the project of European unification was the establishment of a real free market or a liberal social order has been increasingly revealed to be mistaken. Free market rhetoric seems to have been a tactical ruse to conceal the core agenda: the creation of a "federal" super-state.

Unfortunately space does not permit Mr. Tame to expand on his reasoning behind these statements. I do not find them self-evident.

Of course many strong supporters of the EU are "strong" federalists and statist (not necessarily the same thing). Given the traditional role of the state in many of the founding members, this is not surprising. However, the last two decades have seen the role of the state being questioned across the whole continent, not just in Britain. Furthermore, since the struggle to get the Maastricht treaty ratified across Europe, the feasibility of continued "progress" towards a very centralised state has also been brought into question.

Mr. Tame speaks as if there were some controlling intelligence behind the EU, with a core agenda of statism leading to an institution that is "inherently" statist. Fortunately, no political institution has such an "irrevocable" nature. Rather, the EU contains a very wide variety of views, and how it develops will depend upon how all of these views compete in the market place for ideas and in the political market-place of the member states' electorates, as well as upon the market forces in which the EU operates and in the context of which its political decisions are taken.

Mr. Tame points out that,

The political character of Euro-scepticism in Britain is generally that of liberalism in its broadest sense, whether manifest in market-oriented Conservatism, free market economic thought, and classical liberalism and radical libertarianism.

He then goes on to note that "There are, of course, Euro-sceptics from the socialist "Left", the Labour Party and the trade union movement."

Indeed there are, and on the continent these critics are much stronger. In Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy the EU has been used to create political acceptance for the introduction of more free-market policies. There is indeed a debate going on between liberals and statist in the

EU, just as in nearly every other political body in the world, but it is by no means clear that the statisticians have “irrevocably” won it.

In the run up to the German elections next year, Wolfgang Schäuble, the Christian Democrats parliamentary leader, is positioning himself firmly in favour of increased labour flexibility, cuts in subsidies and social security reform. In France, debate continues on the privatisation of Air France and France Telecom. In Italy, the government has recently suffered a setback in its plans to cut welfare, reform pensions and privatise Telecom Italia. These battles are certainly not won by the liberal side, far from it. But the debates are real, forced by circumstances which will not change, and now is the time to engage in them enthusiastically not pull back.

If I wanted to be mischievous I might suggest that the Euro-sceptic view has clothed itself in rhetoric against centralism and statism, but that as the threat of that from the EU has declined, the core agenda of the Euro-sceptics has revealed itself as a move for British secession based on the nationalistic, and illiberal, notion of sovereignty.

SOCIALIST ECONOMICS

Should we feel threatened by European semi-socialist economics? I think not. We can be sure that the effects of inflexible European labour laws leading to appalling levels of unemployment are not some temporary aberration. We know that there is no magic fix to the pension liability problems of Italy and Belgium. We know that there is no more money to find for under-funded health and education systems. These are the economic facts. Therefore, ultimately, reality will force the policies to change. Of course we in Britain should refuse to accept any attempts to force these policies on us, while we wait for the changes that must inevitably happen. We should not have signed up to the Social Chapter of the Maastricht treaty, but that brings me to another point.

BRITAIN — INHERENTLY ECONOMICALLY LIBERAL?

Many libertarians and Euro-sceptics seem to believe that Britain is somehow special, in Europe, in its cultural attachment to liberal economics. I find little compelling evidence for this. It was a British Labour government that decided to sign the Social Chapter. Nobody in the rest of Europe saw our opt-out as the key issue of the day, or was putting great diplomatic pressure on us to surrender it. It was a series of British governments, Labour and Conservative, that built the most socialist health service in Europe and which is having such great difficulty reforming it. It was British governments which destroyed the British car industry through nationalisation.

Opinion surveys show that the Thatcher years did little to change the British people's emotional attachment to the nanny state, or their suspicion of big business. What did change was people's recognition that, much as they regretted it, the real world could no longer afford nanny's salary. The same real world forces will eventually do the same for the rest of Europe. Already we see evidence of this, such as the socialist mayor of Naples selling his airport to BAA, the French government slowly and reluctantly plodding towards the privatisation of Air France and the Germans suddenly getting interested in the strange foreign idea of shareholder value. We just need to be patient and work to keep the focus of the Union on expansion and extending the single market.

EUROPEAN PROTECTIONISM

Some expect the EU, while it builds its internal market, increasingly to erect protectionist barriers around its external borders. Of course, just as in all countries, there are protectionist elements, but they are not notably in the ascendant at present in Europe. The EU is happy to agree open market arrangements with those European countries which do not yet wish to join the EU fully, such as Norway and Switzerland. At the moment the EU, partly encouraged by Spain and Portugal, is making more overtures to Mercosur and the other Latin American free-trade associations than is the US. We have the ASEAN Europe summits and there is even a small, but non-trivial, body of support within Europe for an eventual Atlantic Free Trade Area.

BRITAIN — SOCIALLY LIBERAL?

In terms of non-economic issues, the other nations of Europe are, on balance, no more or less liberal than we are. We have some of the most restrictive licensing laws in Europe. The rest of the continent finds our pub-closing times quite strange. In Düsseldorf I have failed to detect any evidence that the brauhauses' closing at two or three in the morning leads to violence on the streets or all of my colleagues coming into work drunk every morning.

The same is true of pornography and other sex entertainment laws in Europe. I can watch hard core pornography in my hotel room in

Düsseldorf (for a price of course — the Germans are capitalists!). Heathrow may have its world-beating airport shopping, but Frankfurt International is the only airport I know that has a large sex shop on its premises, just past baggage reclaim, and a porno cinema to entertain you while you wait for your plane. Amsterdam I hardly need mention. I just refer you to Danny Frederick's highly entertaining pieces on that subject.³

Britain seems to be about to implement the most restrictive tobacco laws in Europe (partly, I accept, inspired by a European ruling, but we seem to be adopting this one with uncharacteristic enthusiasm!).

Our system of justice and our approach to law and order is hardly the most liberal in the world at present. Please don't infer from this comment that I support the continental inquisitorial system over our adversarial one. All I wish to point out is that we are increasingly failing to understand the strengths of our traditional common law system; of the basic legal freedoms and protections we used to take for granted,⁴ and that we are hardly liberal in our view of penal policy. Some Dutch friends of mine are appalled at the cameras on our city streets.

I accept that we stand alone in the battle against identity cards, but perhaps they are the price we have to pay for freedom of movement within the Union at the same time as we expand to central Europe and, I hope, to Turkey, where external borders are going to remain much more porous for some time.

BRITAIN — INHERENTLY INDIVIDUALISTIC?

The British uniquely individualistic? This is the country that covered south London in identical semi-detached houses; the country where for years council house residents were not allowed to paint their front doors in whatever colour they chose. In Belgium there is a law restricting residential property developers from building identical houses in the same street.

This is the country where the death of the Princess of Wales led to the most astonishing display of mass grief. This is the country whose Armed Forces are often reckoned to be the best in the world — being a soldier is hardly the epitome of individualistic, iconoclastic, eccentricity. Of course the English have their share of bloody-minded individualists, but then, despite their addiction to the state, so do the French.

THE EUROPEAN IDEAL

In conclusion I am an internationalist and I do find the idea of building an ever closer union of the peoples of Europe an inspiring idea. Note the 's' on peoples and note the reference to people, not states or Governments. The EU is an institution and we can use it for good or ill. In a time of turbulent change, with great pressures on the continental social models that we all know to be failures, the changes which will come as we build the EU create opportunities as well as challenges. Libertarians need to argue the case for a liberal Europe, not take a stand for a nationalist inward looking sovereignty — hardly a libertarian concept.

I am a citizen of the continent in whose South East corner democracy and individualism were invented, and from whose North West corner these ideas and values were spread around the world. I am a citizen of the continent which has suffered so mightily this century in the struggle against totalitarianism of the right and left. I am a citizen of the continent, so many of whose people left for the new world, taking their liberal values with them and leaving their bigotries behind, to live and work together and build what for a while was the closest thing the human race has come to a libertarian society. I am a citizen of the continent of Shakespeare and Molière, Adam Smith and Martin Luther, Newton and Galileo, Constable and Leonardo de Vinci.

I am a European and I want to live in a free and liberal society that is worthy of the history of the peoples of all this continent, the cradle of civilisation. I want to build freedom and prosperity not just in a corner which is forever England, but across the whole of this continent from the Atlantic to the edge of Asia, from Sicily to the Arctic Circle. And after that, well where next? The European Union can help to build freedom everywhere, should we wish it.

NOTES

1. Glasgow is further from London than either Paris or Bruxelles.
2. Chris R. Tame, *The Euro-Sceptical Directory*, Occasional Paper No. 29, The Bruges Group, London, 1997.
3. *A Weekend in Amsterdam: One Libertarian's Experience of Freedom*, Personal Perspectives No. 5, 1992, and *Amsterdam Revisited*, Personal Perspectives No. 9, 1996, both Libertarian Alliance, London.
4. See Sean Gabb, *The Full Coercive Apparatus of a Police State: Thoughts on the Dark Side of the Thatcher Decade*, Legal Notes No. 6, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1989.