Good morning, thank you very much John for inviting me to be here with you today, it’s a real pleasure. First of all I would like to thank John Denham for inviting me to take part in this event. I also would like to thank the University of Winchester for a warm welcome. I think that it is quite difficult to speak after Wynn Jones because he has just presented an excellent analysis regarding how things are developing at the moment; a difficult exercise that you have backed with some data. This is really useful for me because I don’t need to do that.

I would like to start by asking one question: when we talk about England what are we analysing? One way to respond is to say that we are first of all considering what I have referred to as the UK’s shift from empire to EU member state, and there is a huge difference between being an empire and being an EU member state.

I’m originally from Catalonia, although I have been living in the UK for over 20 years. Today I find myself debating Englishness with you, here at Winchester. I am fully aware that English people don’t need any lessons being taught to them. So please take my points as humble comments from an outsider; an outsider that loves England and feels grateful for the opportunities that this great country has provided to me and others.

I feel proud of my national identity, I’m a Catalan speaker and that is my mother tongue; I also speak other languages and I’ve been to different places. I know how dear identity is and how easy it is to damage trust if we don’t understand each other in terms of identity, and especially if we do not respect each other’s identity. Having said so I would like to move on and go straight into the points that I would like to debate with you in this seminar.

The United Kingdom and the European Union are both changing, and we are living through a process of fundamental transformations that are life changing and; change often proves difficult to catch up with. It is within this new scenario that the United Kingdom stands as a world power and, as such, it continues to maintain a distinct identity and status, which includes a very close relationship with the United States of America; I consider this of fundamental importance.
In contrast, if we turn to the European Union we can observe that it is made up of nation-states, and that signals a huge difference between the two. To make things even more complicated, within the EU, we are faced with fundamental divisions among EU member states. For instance, the migration crisis that we are currently witnessing has revealed very important differences among European Union nation-states; in fact, the distance among them is huge and growing and this is a feature that will undoubtedly impact upon the way in which England defines itself within this new political scenario.

There is a huge gap between embracing and supporting the values and objectives of EU economic and political integration, and adopting a pro-European stance exclusively grounded upon economic reasons and lifestyle choices. Let’s remind ourselves that a still embryonic European identity relies on the shared consciousness of belonging to an economic and political space defined by capitalism, social welfare, liberal democracy, respect for human rights, freedom and the rule of law, prosperity and progress. In my view, these are the pillars of a European identity defined primarily by the sharing of a specific political culture and the desire to benefit from the economic advantages derived from EU membership. But are these sufficient to generate loyalty to the EU? As early as 2007\(^1\) I had already warned of the perils of a return of nationalism and ethnic politics. I also cautioned of the potential consequences if a major economic crisis were to affect the EU, prompting some member states to believe that they could do better on their own or by establishing alternative partnerships. This is what we are witnessing at the moment, this is what British Euroscepticism is about; the in-out vote on 23\(^{rd}\) June 2016 will have the power to decide. In my view, European identity is best defined as an emergent ‘non-emotional identity’, in sharp contrast with the powerful and emotionally charged national identities of our time.

For instance, countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal and Germany initially embraced the European Union project. That took place at a time when nation-states were prepared to relinquish some aspects of their own jealously guarded sovereignty; in order to participate and profit from a dynamic internal market constructed around the European Union.

As a result the EU has become a global player; however, the economic crisis has changed perceptions and attitudes towards the EU. Today both the EU economic and political landscapes have been transformed. The European Union has shifted from acting as a magnet for those attracted to its prosperity to a time in which the depth of the economic downturn has completely altered the socio-political scenario. This is exemplified by the case of Greece; Greece has brought instability to the EU and it is seriously threatening the survival of the EU as we know it. In this context Euroscepticism comes to the fore.

I define Euroscepticism as being critical of the European Union and opposed to the process of European political integration. If the current trend continues, we will see member-states granting priority to the idea of the EU as a huge profitable market that

---

does not envisage a political union, or some kind of political integration akin to Jacques Delors’ project of building a political union. Focussing upon a definition of the EU as a huge market will weaken the values and principles initially promoted by the EU founding fathers. In that context political integration will not only halt; it may weaken and eventually disappear.

At present, we are already witnessing how some different political actors try to pick and choose those attributes that make the EU suitable to their own interests. In my view this is problematic because, if you have an instrumental view of the European Union, then can you really aspire to build a shared identity? Could you generate trust among different EU member states while witnessing radically different and uncoordinated reactions to the migration crisis where one country opens the doors, while the other closes them? The answer is ‘no’.

We are faced with a genuinely difficult scenario of uncertain consequences, and this cannot be detached from events and attitudes in England and how identity is defined in England by the English. Prospects for British, as well as English, identity matter; are complex and point at the question: what type of identity do the English wish to activate and encourage?

When John Denham invited me to this event I decided to talk about Euroscepticism. In doing so I considered that one of the key points to address involved having a clear idea that we are faced with both Euroscepticism on the right and Euroscepticism on the left. If we go back to the idea of Euroscepticism both on the left and on the right we can identify very different political cultures coexisting within the European Union. This matters because a difference in political culture also means a difference in definitions of democracy. To give an example: Catalonia is not considered a separate demos within Spain and any decision affecting its political status has to be sanctioned by all Spanish citizens, including the Catalans. They are what I refer to as ‘a constant minority’2: since the Catalans are a minority within Spain, it follows that they have little or no chance of ever having their voice heard, unless new policies destined to grant ‘voice’ and ‘veto’ power to minorities are in place.

Catalonia should be allowed to hold a referendum on independence based on democratic grounds. Referenda are instruments that provide a clear response from the citizenry and which have been regularly used by European liberal democracies, including Spain. The key question we should be asking here is why a solid non-secessionist Catalan movement has turned into a fully-fledged secessionist movement? What has prompted the shift from devolution to secession? Have all parts concerned done their best to find a democratic peaceful solution to a situation facing gridlock?

In Catalonia, fear associated with the dictatorship is still present among those who lived through the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship that followed it. The strong

---

2 I have first developed the concept of ‘constant minority’ in ‘Catalan Secessionism: Young People’s Expectations and Political Change’, The International Spectator, DOI 10.1080/03932729.2014.952955. Permanent link: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2014.952955
resurgence of conservatism and centralism in contemporary Spain endorses a static conception of the Spanish Constitution. In so doing it prevents further development of democracy as a dynamic process that requires to be constantly updated. Euroscepticism is not limited to rich counties such as the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands or Finland. At present we are witnessing the rise of Euroscepticism in Portugal, Greece and Spain, which from the outset enthusiastically supported the EU. Of course, the EU has enormously contributed to enhancing the economy of EU countries, it also offered security associated with NATO membership.

The economic downturn has changed the atmosphere in which all these questions and attitudes initially emerged, and we are now confronted with a dramatic shift on behalf of countries which, at the outset, defined themselves as enthusiastically pro-EU and which have since turned into Eurosceptics. Yet, in some cases, nation states employ the EU as an excuse for action or inaction within the domestic arena and, at times, they even use it as a scapegoat, thus fuelling nationalism and reinforcing national identity.

Are we using the European Union to grab what is of interest to us only? How far can the EU survive if its nations and peoples adopt a utilitarian attitude toward the EU and neglect the core values associated with its construction? How long may the EU survive without fostering a shared sentiment of belonging among its peoples?

The depth of the economic crisis, exemplified by Greece, has brought instability. As a result, Euroscepticism, defined as criticism of the EU and opposition to the process of political European integration, is currently rising in both the UK and in the EU.

Corruption scandals, very high unemployment (in particular among young people), rampant inequality, resentment and anger about the contrast between what many regard as a wealthy Germany, that has enormously benefited from the EU and the creation of the Euro, and a poor South now struggling to survive. All together, they provide a recipe for disaster.

To sum up: Eurosceptics reject a political union among member states of the EU, they stand against the idea of further political integration; however, they support having a Common Market.

Euroscepticism defends the exceptional and unique character of Britishness: this refers to the identity of the nation and its sense of forming a distinct community. I wonder whether we should say ‘a sense of forming a distinct community’ or not and whether to attribute this to the United Kingdom or to England. We should be aware that, in some instances, Euroscepticism is a response to too much diversity.

So far the idea of building a European identity has failed and I think that there are many European identities that are different and that can be activated at different points in time. For example, how many of us know somebody who will be prepared to die for the EU? Hands up? How many would be prepared to, or have already fought for England or for the United Kingdom? There is a wide gap in here because sometimes it seems that we are living in a world that it is completely detached from the real world in which power, war and sacrifice matter and stand at the basis of what our nations have been aiming for in the past and our grandfathers or fathers have been
fighting for. We need to go back to these and revisit the past to build a new present and future.

In this specific context it seems to me that it is crucial to regenerate the nation, make England, make Catalonia an important democratic home that will enable us to be proud of our roots, proud of what our countries have achieved, proud of all that we have achieved together by embracing democracy and living within an environment of diversity. And if we don’t agree with some of these we should really express it in a democratic clear way and fight and struggle to change it, because this is what democracy is about, at least in my view.

Since the 1970s, the European Union has been regarded as ‘the Other’ against whom the United Kingdom could be defined. We have to revisit this.

We are living through a time of dramatic change, a time in which we need to look at the present but also look at the future, while being aware of the past. The world is changing and the pace of change is faster than ever before, the challenges are greater and the instruments we have to respond to them have become obsolete because the reality they are trying to manage is no longer there, it is in the past.

Today we are witnessing the emergence (re-emergence) of right-wing Euroscepticism, and there is a regressive and conservative Euroscepticism present within British political culture. It is a type of Euroscepticism that has the capacity to be populist and, at the same time appear contemporary and radical, offering some kind of revived discourse of British exceptionalism.

It is my concern that right-wing Euroscepticism may turn into authoritarian ways of doing politics and running society; if we fail to unite in the defence of democracy, and if we are disengaged from the project of making our own nations prosper, we will become slaves of rising authoritarian politics.

Thank you.