

MEMORIAL LECTURE FOR STEPHEN HASELER:

Will Brexit Destroy the United Kingdom?

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Education & Research

Unsurprisingly, I have very mixed feelings about giving this lecture today. I am flattered and honoured to have been invited to speak as a memorial lecturer for Stephen. His contribution to the work and discussion of the Global Policy Institute and of the Federal Trust was immense and will never be forgotten. Many of the topics at the centre of current political discussion, the role of the super-rich in modern capitalism, the concealed fragility of long-standing British institutions, English exceptionalism, were broached in Stephen's writings long before they became fashionable. His academic success testified to his rigorous scholarship and his regular appearances in the mass media always demonstrated his capacity to put forward difficult issues in an accessible and challenging fashion. I am pleased to be able to mark and recall this contribution, not only to the Institute and the Trust but to public debate more widely.

I agreed with Stephen on almost all major issues, including federalism, Europe, the counter-productive nature of economic austerity and the inadequacy of an exclusively Anglo-centric world view. There were only two points on which Stephen and I occasionally disagreed, the monarchy and the England cricket team. I recall harsh words being exchanged when Kevin Pietersen was dropped. In regard to the less important of our disagreements, the monarchy,, I should have enjoyed discussing with him the public sensation recently caused when it turned out that an able-bodied young American woman was able to close a car door unaided. Come back Mrs. Simpson, all is forgiven. When royal weddings took place, Stephen physically fled the country. I on the other hand was content to stay at home in a darkened room watching the Sopranos on Netflix until it was safe once more to turn on the television. Stephen's Republicanism was an essential component of his world view. He was a fearless crusader, eager to ensure that others came to share

the courage of his convictions. I will always miss him and I know there are many in this room who feel the same.

For all these reasons, I would much prefer to be giving today any other kind of lecture than a memorial lecture, and I would want to Stephen Haseler sitting in the front row, ready to disagree with something I had said, or even more disconcertingly, to agree with something I hadn't said. I hope my lecture this evening will reflect, however inadequately, some of the important themes to which Stephen devoted this intellectual and political energy in recent years. Ronald Reagan once said that the secret of a good speech was to skip the bits people weren't interested in. I shall try to follow that good advice.

Stephen was less surprised than many by the outcome of the EU referendum in June 2016. He rightly saw it as the consequence of the cracks and tensions within British political society which he had been discussing for many years. He observed that the initial stages of the Brexit negotiations were exacerbating these tensions, and he was deeply conscious of the further ratcheting effect produced by the indecisive outcome of last year's General Election. My aim this evening is to take Stephen's basic analysis, with which I entirely agree, as a starting-point and project it eighteen months further on, to where we are today. I shall review three basic issues, first the genesis of the 2016 referendum and its damaging outcome in the systemic failings of the UK state; second, the interaction between those failings and the painful progress until now of the Brexit negotiations; and third the likely impact on the stability of the British state of Brexit, if it occurs, an outcome that I regard as by no means assured. There is always a good number of topics for lecturers. The former Governor of the Bank of England Eddy George used to say that there are only three kinds of Central Bankers, those who can count and those who cannot.

The way in which the decision to hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU was taken faithfully mirrored a number of Stephen's abiding concerns about the functioning of the United Kingdom. It was a decision with the most far-reaching potential effects of every kind for the country taken with little care for its wider consequences, and almost exclusively in the Conservative party interest to meet a specifically English problem. It was a decision taken by a social elite arrogantly confident that by holding this referendum it would reinforce its own political position. An extra twist was given to the self-regarding nature of the enterprise by the personal rivalry between two Old Etonians, Boris Johnson and David Cameron. Stephen would have relished the grim irony of recent reports that Boris Johnson now regrets his possibly decisive contribution to the "Leave" campaign. It is not

clear whether in this regret it is the welfare of the country or that of Boris Johnson looms larger. In a supposed representative democracy, few Parliamentarians voting in the House of Commons in 2015 for the referendum to take place honestly believed that the referendum would be in the national interest. The overwhelming majority viewed and the prospect of Brexit with varying degrees of alarm and horror. Yet the party manoeuvrings of Westminster, overwhelmingly tribal in character, ensured that the holding of a referendum, its execution and its outcome have been accepted by a large majority of parliamentarians. The constitutional status of and the procedures for the holding of the referendum were improvised and sloppy, and led later to rancid controversy in the courts. No account was taken in the decision to hold the referendum of the interests of other parts of the United Kingdom apart from England. I shall discuss further below the individual elements of this charge-sheet, but cumulatively it surely represents the polar opposite of a well-functioning political society, particularly one styling itself a parliamentary democracy.

Purely party-related reasons drove David Cameron in 2013 to promise a referendum on British membership of the European Union if his party won the 2015 election. To Mr. Cameron's surprise, an only marginal improvement in the Conservative vote in 2015 compared with 2010, combined with the collapse of the Liberal Democrat vote and a freakish result for the SNP in Scotland, left him able to form a solely Conservative government, elected by 36.9% of the votes cast. It is often claimed that the First Past the Post system has the admirable merit of usually electing strong governments. 2015's government was the very opposite of a strong government. It was one just strong enough to form a Conservative administration but weak enough to be bullied by its radical Eurosceptic wing into holding a reckless referendum, and to ensure that every possible concession was made to these Eurosceptics to give them the best possible chance of winning. The winner takes all nature of our electoral system operated paradoxically to ensure that Mr. Cameron not merely could hold an EU referendum in 2016. He was obliged to do so in order to keep in place the fragile coalition which is today's Conservative Party.

So confident was David Cameron of winning the 2016 referendum that he allowed the franchise to be tilted significantly towards the Leave side by excluding from the vote 17- and 18-year olds, EU citizens of long residence in the UK and British citizens of long residence elsewhere in the EU, all of which voters could well have voted in their majority to remain in the EU. Mr. Cameron also allowed the Eurosceptic wing of his party to pre-empt official campaigning by the Conservative Party, proclaiming the party neutral in a referendum called by its leader. Having spent ten years at the

head of an increasingly Eurosceptic party, Mr. Cameron had ten weeks to turn himself into the leader of a pro-EU coalition. It is hardly surprising that he fell short. He found himself in an ironically similar situation to that of Jeremy Corbyn, whose record is that of a left-wing Eurosceptic, but who bestirred himself to show a strictly limited level of enthusiasm for the European cause during the referendum campaign. A majority of Conservative voters rejected Mr. Cameron's campaigning for "remain," while a large majority of Labour voters voted against Brexit, with scant encouragement from the leader of the Party. These Cameronian and Corbynite anomalies symbolised deeper disequilibria in their two major parties, to which I will return later in the lecture.

It might be argued that the mistakes of David Cameron between 2013 and 2016 were merely calamitous personal mistakes, to which all political systems are more or less vulnerable. The political system in which they took place was however one which encouraged these mistakes initially, made it easier for them to be persisted with and is now contributing to their potentially disastrous outcome. At the heart of the British political system lies its tribalist party system, generated and sustained by the First Past the Post electoral system. It was this political culture which encouraged David Cameron to set the long-term welfare of the country a long way behind his desire to maintain a fragile intra-party unity in 2013, in the hope of allowing his particular political tribe to continue in power in 2015. It was this tribalism which persuaded many doubtful Conservative MPs to vote in favour of the holding of a referendum after the General Election in 2015. Even today it is this tribalism which makes it so difficult for many MPs to approach the question of Brexit from the perspective of the national interest rather than party advantage.

In parallel to these intra-party considerations, when David Cameron was re-elected as Prime Minister in 2015 in the freakish circumstances described, the pernicious doctrine of untrammelled Parliamentary sovereignty meant that he was able to mobilise his Parliamentary majority for the holding of a referendum without being bound by any constitutional or institutional constraints upon the way this referendum was to be held. If, contrary to the usual description of the UK as a representative parliamentary democracy, a referendum was to be held on such a vital and complicated subject as British membership of the EU, it might have been expected that the legal status of the referendum would be demanding and watertight. No such precautions were taken or indeed in the absence of a written constitution needed to be taken. In response to the very reasonable suggestion that such a break with Parliamentary practice might perhaps be based upon a reinforced majority of say 60% of those voting, the Europe Minister of the day David Lidington

assured the House of Commons that no such provision was necessary, since the referendum was purely consultative. Once result of the referendum was known, David Lidington himself has been one of those arguing vociferously that the House of Commons had no choice but to implement the narrow outcome of the 2016 referendum. The later controversy in the High and Supreme Court about the precise legal consequences of the referendum mark a sorry epilogue to this ludicrous chain of events. It must place a question mark over the supposed robustness of the British unwritten constitution that such a process could act itself out in this grotesque fashion, with only minimal public or even elite protest. I will not need to remind many in this audience that it was a private citizen Gina Miller who initiated the legal case that ended up in the Supreme Court, not an MP. The Parliamentary slaves love their chains. *Servi catenas amant* as the former Mayor of London might express it. I can hear Stephen snorting with disapproval at the Latin, whether it comes from me or from Boris Johnson.

Events during the referendum reminded us, if we needed to be reminded, of the merits of genuine parliamentary democracy and the dangers of plebiscites. An overall narrow majority to leave the Union was achieved on the basis of widespread lies and fantasies and a distribution of the vote that could only exacerbate existing divisions within the UK. As is well known both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, Scotland by a large margin. Both during and after the referendum the Electoral Commission showed itself a broken reed, unable to check deliberate misrepresentations and only very tardily moving after the referendum was over to investigate founded complaints of irregularities and law-breaking, particularly by the Leave campaign. Even if the Remain campaign had been successful in 2016, the referendum and the events leading up to it would have been a sorry, sordid episode in our national history. Stephen, like many others, regarded the casual anarchy of the referendum process with the greatest possible disdain. To elevate the narrow outcome of this ramshackle and shoddy affair to an unalterable expression of the popular will was for him the proof positive that the absence of a written constitution was an irresistible invitation to manipulation and bad faith. Untrammelled Parliamentary sovereignty was abused in 2016 by those having no real respect for it to allow a Conservative government to transpose to the national stage its internal disputes, offering the electorate an insufficiently specified binary choice on a matter of great complexity. The weaknesses and ambiguities of the British political system permitted the bolting on to an anyway doubtfully functional Parliamentary system of a legally fuzzy referendum that had been carried out in the most dubious and controversial fashion possible.

Given the nature of the referendum process, it was always a vain hope that the negotiations leading up to Brexit could be conducted in a measured or rational fashion. As we have seen, the referendum was called into being in the hope of settling the civil war raging in the Conservative Party over Europe. Stephen had interesting views on the nature of this civil war, which he saw as pitting Thatcherite advocates of the minimal state against those who recognised a necessary and even benevolent role for state action. In signing the Single European Act Mrs. Thatcher had persuaded herself that it was a manifesto of the minimal state and was furious to discover that she had been deceiving herself in this regard. She therefore blamed the European Union for her own misconceptions, a dishonourable tradition which continues in the Conservative Party to this day. Far from being settled, the internal divisions of the Conservative Party were given an extra and more dangerous twist by the narrow outcome of the referendum. The radical Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative party has moved in to claim its spoils, showing no desire to function as generous or conciliatory victors. They were the winners and they wanted to take it all. Over the past two years, the Conservative Parliamentary Party has been riven by the conflict between those who wanted the United Kingdom after Brexit to remain closely aligned with the European Union as a trading partner; and those who did not, or at least attached little or no importance to doing so. It is important to stress that this division finds little echo in the broader Conservative Party. Most of those who select Conservative MPs and may in future deselect them are squarely behind the most visceral and combative form of Euroscepticism. The confidence with which the ERG goes about its business is a function of the wide measure of support it knows it enjoys within the Party outside Westminster. As the leader of a minority government, the Prime Minister needs to pay at least some attention to the majority of her MPs who recognize the unwisdom of Brexit and are still trying to rescue what can be rescued from the Brexit shipwreck. Her desire to find a negotiating strategy reconciling these two widely different approaches within her Parliamentary Party led over many months simply to stalemate and incoherence. Two major policy statements in Florence and Lancaster House came and went without coming any nearer to a model for the future relationship between the EU and UK that would be acceptable to the European partners. They were widely and rightly rejected by the rest of the EU as “cherry-picking.” Having broken off her engagement with the European fiancé Mrs. May has sent back the letters and Valentine cards but wants to keep the jewels for sentimental reasons. The Chequers plan was a final and belated attempt to produce a proposal at least

capable of serious discussion with our European partners. The cautious welcome it received was a testimony to the low level of expectation prevalent on the EU side.

It is grossly over-optimistic to claim that postponing the triggering of Article 50 would have led to a more rational course of the Brexit negotiations. Only the opening of negotiations and many months of unsuccessful negotiations could ever have brought forth even the limited degree of realism implicit in the Chequers plan. As we know, the Chequers plan pleased neither side of the Conservative debate and attracted a final, unexpectedly categorical rejection from the European Union at the Salzburg summit. The “Chequers” plan, while presented by Mrs. May as a compromise, leant distinctly in the direction of those wishing a radical break with the European Union. It seems likely that the criticism now directed at it by Mr. Tusk and others will hasten the process whereby the Conservative Party unambiguously embraces a more distant future relationship with the EU after Brexit, perhaps taking the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as a model for this relationship. At the beginning of the Brexit negotiations this would have been styled as a “hard Brexit,” because it implies that the UK will remain outside both the single market and the Customs Union. It is widely recognized as being the most economically damaging form of Brexit apart from an entirely chaotic and non-consensual Brexit. It seems however to be the likeliest form of Brexit for the present Conservative Party to be able to accept.

In many ways, this final acceptance of a more distant and less integrated future relationship will clarify and facilitate the Brexit negotiations. Philip Hammond’s claim earlier this week that such an FTA is not on offer from the European Union is bizarrely incorrect. It was the repeated argument of Michel Barnier and others that Mrs. May’s “red lines” of the rejection of free movement and the rejection of the authority of the European Court of Justice made any closer relationship than an FTA impossible. Philip Hammond may have been drawing attention, albeit in a misleading fashion, to an enormous difficulty thrown up by the prospect of an EU/UK FTA, the problem of Northern Ireland and the Irish backstop. As the Brexit negotiations have proceeded, Churchill’s “dreary steeples” of Northern Ireland have come once again to play a decisive role in British politics.

There is an irony in the centrality of Ireland to the Brexit negotiations. The Easter Rising of 1916 is rightly regarded as the first crack in the edifice of the British empire. A hundred years later many of those voting in the EU referendum succumbed to the seductive charms of imperial nostalgia. It has fallen to Ireland to remind the rulers of the UK how different the world is today from what it was one

hundred years ago. Mrs May supposedly remarked to Jean-Claude Juncker in November of last year that she could not believe that a country as relatively unimportant as Ireland should be allowed to block progress in the Brexit negotiations. She has had nearly a year to ponder the falseness of that perception. In the strange, oscillating Eurosceptic narrative of British superiority and British victimhood the idea that the EU wants to punish the UK for leaving the EU is a recurrent theme. The member states of the EU are of course far too preoccupied defending what they see as their own interests in the Brexit negotiations to be bothered with punishing the UK. I do sense however in some of our EU partners a readiness to do something that might sound similar, namely to teach the British a lesson. That lesson ought not to be a painful one. It is a lesson about the power of solidarity. There are many more small states in the EU than there are large states. These small states are reassured by what they rightly see as the willingness of the EU as a whole to support Ireland in defending its vital national interest in the preservation of the Good Friday Agreement.

From the beginning of the Brexit negotiations the Irish government was well aware that if the UK did not enter into an EEA-like arrangement with the EU after Brexit, then Brexit was likely to lead in to the erection of at least some customs and regulatory barriers between the United Kingdom and the European Union. This matters to the Irish government because Anglo-Irish trade is centrally important to the Irish economy. Ireland is already looking against the prospect of Brexit to diversify its trade away from the United Kingdom, but this is a process that inevitably will take time. Even more importantly, however, new barriers to trade within the island of Ireland are rightly feared by the Irish government as a potential threat to the existing level of economic, social and political integration in the island of Ireland, to which the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 made a decisive contribution. Supported by the rest of the EU, the Irish government has made it a central objective of the Brexit negotiations for the EU side to ensure that whatever the general trading arrangement between the UK and the EU after Brexit there will be arrangements applicable to the island of Ireland that ensure genuinely frictionless interchange between Northern Ireland and the Republic. The emerging prospect of an FTA's being the final outcome of the Brexit negotiations will certainly increase the concerns of the Irish government in this regard. If the European Union is willing to conclude with the British government an FTA agreement, that agreement must in the view of the Irish government and the EU as a whole contain provisions which protect the specific interests of the island of Ireland.

In the Joint Report of December 2017, the British government unambiguously agreed to the principle of an Irish backstop to protect these interests, but demurred at the Commission's formulation of this principle in a draft treaty text of March, 2018. The UK's partners have been awaiting since that date for the proposed alternative British version of a final treaty text. There is considerable suspicion that Mrs. May's government, under pressure from the DUP, is now unable or unwilling to come up with any text remotely acceptable to Ireland and the EU. The interview of Boris Johnson in this weekend's Sunday Times, describing the backstop simply as a "form of words", "*verba et praeter ea nihil*", will have fuelled this suspicion. The debacle of Salzburg strongly suggests that British officials and politicians are too much given to wishful thinking in their assessment of likely attitudes and negotiating tactics from the EU side. I can well remember from my own time in the Foreign Office the eagerness with which British officials often presented some limited congruence of views with some limited number of other EU member states on a specific issue as indicative of an unrealistically wide measure of support for the whole panoply on British ideas about the European Union. I must say in fairness to the Foreign Office that I am unable from personal experience to confirm the parallel claim that the FCO has only two underlying prescriptions, first that it is too early to say what should be done and second that it is too late to do anything about it, with only a minimal temporal gap between the two.

There are recent suggestions that the British government is preparing to make further concessions on the Irish issue. If these reports are correct, the suggestion that the UK could remain indefinitely in a form of Customs Union with the EU will arouse opposition from the DUP and many Conservative MPs, while being uncertain of acceptance by the EU. The dependence of the British government on the DUP to sustain its minority government has drastically undermined Mrs May's scope for flexibility in this field. There are moreover many in the Conservative Party actively working to prevent any Withdrawal Agreement and controversy over the "backstop" is for them a welcome pretext for frustrating the negotiating process. Much of the Conservative press has spent the past eighteen months claiming that the Irish government is pursuing an agenda of Irish reunification by exaggerating the objective problems caused for the island of Ireland by an FTA or similar outcome to the Brexit negotiations.

Any original European desire to help Mrs. May and her government in managing the self-inflicted wound of Brexit is now much diminished by months of evasion and incoherence on the British side. It may well be that some on the EU side overestimate the likelihood of British concessions on this issue. But there will

equally be many who regard with distaste what they see as British attempts at blackmail, particularly when that blackmail is attempted in a fraught situation exclusively created by the British themselves. Mrs. May seemed to associate herself with this bizarre misconception earlier in the week, arguing that the EU had an obligation to follow her interpretation of the outcome of the 2016 referendum held in the United Kingdom.

Although Ireland is the most intractable set of problems relating to the Brexit negotiations, there is another cluster of problems that may well prevent the House of Commons from accepting whatever agreement Mrs. May might present to Parliament later this year. This concerns the so-called divorce bill, which will oblige the United Kingdom to continue paying its contribution to the budgetary system of the EU until the end of the projected “transition period” in December 2020 and beyond. This payment was presented by David Davis in early 2018 as a highly contentious issue, but it was one which was rapidly settled by British concession. As a pretext for this ignominious retreat, the British government has presented this divorce bill as being a quid pro quo for a favourable future trading arrangement. Seen from the EU side, there is no truth at all in this conjunction. The UK agreed in 2013 to the current EU budget until 2020 and there is no sympathy in Brussels or national capitals for the view that meeting British obligations under the current budget creates any reciprocal obligation on the EU. The Withdrawal Agreement regulating British withdrawal from the Union and the Political Declaration pointing towards the future trading relationship will have no conditionality between the two documents. When this reality is spelt out the House of Commons later in the year, it will be yet another unwelcome difficulty for the Prime Minister to surmount in winning her “meaningful vote.” Nor can it be guaranteed that the contents of the Political Declaration will greatly commend themselves to the House of Commons. Opinion within the EU 27 has recently been hardening on the subject of the Declaration and its specificity. The more specific the Declaration is, the clearer it will make to Parliamentarians that the future trading relationship between the UK and the EU will be much less favourable than currently, and its terms will be set essentially by the EU. Sherlock Holmes once remarked to Dr. Watson that the giant rat of Sumatra was a story for which the world “is not yet prepared.” The House of Commons is in the same situation with regard to the overall outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

Let me end with a number of conclusions and predictions about the impact of Brexit on the British state. Such conclusions and predictions can only be highly

speculative. The volatility and uncertainty of the present situation is an eloquent testimony to the political tsunami unleashed by the Brexit process.

First, I find it very difficult to believe that this Conservative government can come to any Withdrawal Arrangement with the European Union. Controversy over the Irish backstop and the divorce bill will almost certainly generate opposition within the Party so widespread as to make it politically impossible for Mrs. May to conclude an agreement with the EU that will not destroy her government and irreparably divide her party. Mrs. May has made it clear over the past three years that there is nothing more important to her than the preservation of the Conservative Party in government in something like its present format. I am sure she genuinely believes that the preservation of a Conservative government is in the high national interest. I do not however believe that the House of Commons as a whole will be prepared to acquiesce in any anarchic outcome to the Brexit negotiations. I personally think it unlikely that there will be a General Election in the near future, because the Conservative Party and the DUP will use their majority to continue sustaining the present government, not least because of the DUP's fear of a Corbyn-led government. If the House of Commons wishes to act to prevent a catastrophic Brexit next year, I imagine it will consider two main options, a further referendum or a national government. I personally would welcome a national government to hold a new referendum and perhaps change the voting system-----stranger things have happened. But I think it more likely that a further referendum would take place, with an extension of the Article 50 being asked for and granted. I would be surprised if remaining in the EU were not then one of the options on the ballot paper. This new referendum would in my view be won by the "Remain" camp and the present structure of British party politics would be reconfigured probably during and certainly after the referendum campaign. The reconstructed party landscape would make easier, but by no means entirely straightforward, the UK's future role within the European Union.

Second, the possibility cannot be ruled out that Mrs. May is able in extremis to conclude a Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, with an Irish backstop and pointing towards an FTA in future between the EU and the UK. This is obviously an intrinsically undesirable outcome for the United Kingdom and one that will leave much economic uncertainty throughout the so-called transition period. It is a million miles away from the lofty talk of a "bespoke arrangement" and frictionless trade. It is emphatically not what a large number of those voting for Brexit in 2016 thought they were voting for, which was essentially the continuation of present economic interchanges between the UK and EU. If Mrs. May does achieve such a

Withdrawal Agreement, I think the parliamentary arithmetic would be very tight for its acceptance or rejection. The DUP might well vote against it because of any Irish backstop it contained. There would be crypto-remainer Conservatives voting against it. There would be many perhaps most of the Labour MPs voting against it. The SNP would presumably vote against it. The ERG might well vote against it if Mrs. May presented its terms as being those contained in the “Chequers” proposals. If a Parliamentary majority could be constructed against Mrs. May’s Withdrawal Agreement, the alternatives outlined in the case of “No deal” would come into play, with a possible further option for the House of Commons to ask the government to reopen negotiations with the EU. I very much doubt whether the EU would be willing seriously to envisage such a possibility.

Third, if any kind of Brexit takes place, and even perhaps if Brexit does not take place, the constitutional stability of the United Kingdom will be and indeed already has been gravely undermined. This was an issue to which Stephen Haseler was always particularly sensitive. He often spoke of the United Kingdom as an “English superstate,” the constitutional immobilism of which contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. I should personally not be surprised if in ten years’ time Northern Ireland has ceased to be part of the United Kingdom. A “no deal” Brexit would be such a failure of English statecraft, particularly with regard to Ireland, that the credibility and viability of British rule in the Six Counties would inevitably be called into increasing question. A majority of those voting in 2016 in Northern Ireland, going beyond the traditional Nationalist community in Ulster, wanted Northern Ireland to remain in the European Union in 2016. Scandal and division continue to plague the most outspoken representatives of Ulster Unionism in the DUP. It would be surprising if a border poll did not rapidly move up the political agenda if the UK crashes out of the EU in 2019 and a hard border has to be re-established between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Even if there is a consensual Withdrawal Agreement, it can only be conditional upon an Irish backstop that will ensure that in significant ways Northern Ireland is more fully integrated into the economic life of the EU than is the rest of the United Kingdom. This economic integration must over time create pressure for political change in the island of Ireland. Similar considerations apply to Scotland. A “no deal” Brexit would be a major shot in the arm for the Scottish National Party, and an Irish backstop for “hard Brexit” would inevitably create demands for similar treatment of Scotland. There is already a willing audience in Scotland for claims that the London government is looking to retain for itself all powers returned to the United Kingdom

from the EU after Brexit. These complaints will inevitably grow in political prominence and resonance over the years of the “transition” period.

Fourth, whether it happens before or after Brexit, the present party political configuration of British politics cannot long be sustained. Both the Labour and Conservative Parties are profoundly dysfunctional organizations, which have abandoned the traditional claim to present themselves to the electorate as “broad churches,” but are rather in thrall to narrow sections of their political spectrum. The ERG dominates the Conservative Party and Momentum is increasingly tightening its grip on the Labour Party. This sectarianism is actively encouraged by the First Past the Post system, as a result of which those who feel alienated and estranged within their respective political formations see no possibility of effective political action outside the two main parties. The crippling experience of the Liberal Democrats in government has reinforced this template. But this is an essentially rotten and fragile structure, which Brexit has laid bare. The British political system currently attempts to shoehorn six parties into three, English nationalists and cosmopolitan globalists into the Conservative Party, social democrats and uncompromising socialists into the Labour Party and economic liberals and centrists into the Liberal Democrats. When this system functions well, it certainly has merits in marginalising extremism and sectarianism, but it is a system which finds self-repair very difficult. Brexit shows every sign of forcing this process of self-repair. Present party alignments could not survive the holding of an EU referendum. A “hard Brexit” instead of a referendum would confirm for ever the status of the Conservative Party as the flagship of English nationalism. Important elements of the traditional Conservative coalition risk being alienated by that development. On the other side of the political spectrum already credible reports are surfacing of a new centrist party to come into being after March, 2019, peopled largely by Labour members and supporters who are unable to stomach Jeremy Corbyn. Tribal politics favoured by the First Past the Post System bear a substantial part of the responsibility for taking us so far down the Brexit path. It would be a despairing conclusion to argue that there is no reverse from this path in the uncertainty and volatility that Brexit will inevitably continue to generate. Something has got to give and I think it will in the foreseeable future. Reality can be kept at arm’s length for a surprisingly long period of time, but when the dam is breached, the flood comes pouring in.

This has been a bleak review of the current and recent state of British politics, but I think it is one that Stephen would recognise. I have painted a picture of an immobile, self-regarding political system which always found it difficult to respond to the interaction, on a basis of equality, with other democratic political systems in

Europe. This incapacity for creative political interaction is perfectly illustrated by the difficulty of the Brexit negotiations, where the British side has consistently regarded the objectively stronger EU side as being the partner in the negotiations destined only to receive their instructions once the British side had decided what they wanted from the negotiations. The insistence of Mrs. May at the recent Salzburg summit that the EU had no choice but to accept her ragged and confusing compromise agreed at Chequers was a particularly egregious example of this mindset, and evoked a predictably negative response. Gradually, I believe, the realisation is gaining ground in this country that the United Kingdom is dealing from a position of weakness with the EU, a weakness that cannot be compensated by enthusiastic recollections of films about the Battle of Britain. There is a saying among global trade negotiators that the world is divided between cannibals and lunch. The UK may be finding painfully that leaving the protection of the cannibals has condemned it to become lunch. It was certainly Stephen's view that the English superstate was just as incapable of responding to new challenges internationally as it was domestically. I do not think that attempts to present the EU as uniquely responsible by its intransigence for the difficult course of the negotiations will carry much weight over time with the British public.

When I read in the engagement columns of the *The Times* that the divorce announced between the EU and the UK will not now take place, Stephen will be one of the first people in my mind. In specific memory of him, I will drink (although not simultaneously) a glass of champagne and a glass of Diet Coca Cola. Adlai Stevenson famously complained that more Americans like Coca Cola than champagne. Stephen was capable of enjoying both with equal gusto. Indeed he was a man unusually capable of passing on to others the enjoyment he derived from aspects of life. We shall not only miss his ideas, we will miss his company as well. I am happy that we have the opportunity this afternoon to remember both.