A Tale of Two Referendums
The European Union as a model for the 'British Union'?

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Introduction

A number of European countries currently feel themselves pulled in two directions at once. On the one hand, they are in the process of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty, the latest in a series of treaties which have sought to determine the relationship between the European Union and its member states. This may be a relatively straightforward process or it may, as in the UK, be surrounded by controversy, months of parliamentary infighting and claims of 'ceding too much power to Brussels'. At the same time, European countries often face pressure from within, in the form of various nationalist movements seeking greater autonomy or even independence – for instance Flanders, Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque country.[1] They therefore find themselves at one and the same time called upon to share more power 'upwards', at European level, and 'downwards' to regional or 'national' level within their own territories.

Of course the picture varies from country to country. The Czech Republic, which was formed only 15 years ago through the 'Velvet Divorce' which split the former Czechoslovakia, feels little internal pressure from Moravian and Silesian nationalism. On the other hand, many Czechs have a strong sense of 'ceding too much power to Brussels', as reflected in the statements of its current President and former Prime Minister, Vaclav Klaus. In the case of Belgium, on the other hand, there is less sense of having national interests overridden by an 'all-powerful EU bureaucracy', but a strong awareness of powerful internal forces for increased Flemish autonomy or independence. Countries with strong internal pressure from nationalist movements may therefore be relatively comfortable with the 'Brussels bureaucracy', while countries with little internal pressure may find the Lisbon Treaty hard to accept.

This article focuses on one country – the United Kingdom. It does so partly because a single example, studied in some detail, might suggest approaches which can be applied more generally elsewhere in Europe. But the main reason for focusing on the UK is that it is the country which, perhaps above all others, faces simultaneous pressure from 'above' and 'below'. Looking at the situation of the UK is therefore helpful when examining some of the constitutional implications, of both greater integration at the European level and greater devolution to national and regional levels within member states.

The autumn of 2007 saw two strong demands for a referendum emerge in the UK. One concerned the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty or even (should there be a Conservative government after 2009) its acceptance post-ratification. The other concerned the future of Scotland within the UK, including the possibility of eventual independence. The level of demand for these two referendums has risen and fallen in waves, and is clearly dependent on a range of domestic political factors. Yet to a greater or lesser extent both are important for British politics, whether directly fashioning its course or haunting it from somewhere in the background.

This article will suggest that there is a curious irony in the situation of the United Kingdom. On the one hand it is one of the EU's most 'eurosceptic' members; on the other hand, its own internal problems with devolution just might lead it to a new appreciation of those 'two-tier solutions' which it all too easily dismisses as invasive and bureaucratic. Dealing with Cardiff and Edinburgh, in other words, might just make London more willing to deal constructively with Brussels.

Brussels and Edinburgh: Twin Threats to the UK?

It has been suggested that those who fear for a loss of sovereignty in Westminster find themselves facing in two directions. On the one hand they look eastwards towards Brussels. This is when we start to hear them talk of 'red lines' and areas of national sovereignty that cannot be compromised. But to the North and West they also face calls from Wales and Scotland for a real devolution of power to what London has all too easily dismissed in the past as the 'Celtic fringe'. What can be made of these 'twin threats'?

Where the 'threat from Brussels' is concerned, there is a long tradition of British 'euroscepticism', the reasons for which have been highlighted many times. The misfortune of joining in the early 1970s, just as the great post-war boom started to turn sour with the explosion in oil prices, is an obvious factor. So is the country's loss of status as a 'superpower', which led to the feeling that becoming involved with Europe was a lowering of its sights, after so much involvement with the whole world as an imperial power. Ireland, which joined at the same time as the UK and which is even further away from the European mainland geographically, welcomed the EU as a broadening of perspective, a way of avoiding the dominance of Britain. But to the British themselves the EEC and then the EU constituted more a narrowing of perspective, a reduction from the world role represented, even today, by the Commonwealth, however little it might mean in practical terms. Even the continuing currents of memory from wartime have echoes of the famous Low Cartoon of 1940 which depicts a man on the White Cliffs of Dover shaking his fist and shouting across the Channel after the surrender of France, 'Very well, alone!' Fighting without allies at least meant avoiding deals and compromises. Some of the British seem to want to shake their fists all over again at perceived threats from across the Channel.

Because of this history of 'euroscepticism', the precise nature of the 'threat from Brussels' is often hard to delineate. People have a general sense of being encroached upon, fed by headlines like 'Britain to lose its veto powers in fifty more areas', without much sense of what these areas are or whether they are really important. There is a sense that 'Brussels gets in the way' without a precise sense of *how* it gets in the way. The 'red lines' response seems to imagine a threat which is everywhere and can at best be kept out of 'Brussels-free' areas. The notion that individual member states might actually benefit from certain decisions being made at the European level is submerged in the presumption that Brussels does nothing but interfere. Consequently there is very little perception of the value of a two-tier system, where certain decisions are rightly taken at a European level and others at the national level. There is a strong feeling that things don't need to be decided at the European level at all.

The other 'threat', the 'threat from Edinburgh' (and to a lesser extent Cardiff), can also be traced back at least thirty years to the discussions over devolution in the 1970s, but it has become much more significant since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The elections of May 2007, in which the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) was the largest minority and therefore entitled to form a government in Scotland, further added to fears in London.

Indeed, it is clear that devolution has started to produce 'results' north of the border. The first annual conference of the SNP, held at the end of October 2007, celebrated a range of measures that made (or would soon make) Scottish provision different from English in health, transport and education. Some of these measures may fall foul of budgetary constraints, but it is fair to say that the differences between Scotland and England in terms of social provision are starting to be felt.

Furthermore, it would be surprising if Scotland were not to be granted a greater degree of control over its economic and fiscal arrangements in future. The argument south of the border tends to be that Scotland's generous welfare provision is a product of subsidies from London, while Scotland complains that its funding levels are being cut. Many commentators appear to think that a lasting solution to the controversy about various funding formulae and their application to Scotland can only be achieved through giving Scotland control not only over the spending of money, but also over its raising.[2]

The most controversial area into which Scotland would like to extend its devolutionary powers is foreign and defence policy. When in October 2007, as part of his campaign to rid Scotland of nuclear weapons, Alex Salmond wrote to countries that had signed up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), asking them to back his bid for Scotland to have observer status at future treaty talks and emphasising that the Scottish Parliament was opposed to Trident, Westminster was duly outraged. Labour MP Eric Joyce said that the letter could "potentially damage our national security interests" and insisted that defence was not an area devolved to Holyrood. Meanwhile Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Nicol Stephen MSP said the Scottish Government should get on with the job it was elected to do.

From this account of Scotland's bid for increased devolution, it is clear that it already possesses a degree of autonomy in many social and welfare areas, and that there are reasons to suppose that this might extend to more general economic and financial areas in future. However, it is equally clear that London will draw the line at any independent defence or foreign policy. Should Scottish demands for autonomy extend into this area, it will clearly be seen as a threat from within to the sovereignty of the UK.

Whereas the 'threat' from Brussels tends to be seen in terms of a general desire to interfere more in British affairs, the 'threat' from Scotland is more that of wanting to extend autonomy from areas in which Scottish control is seen as reasonable to areas in which it is not. The creation of the Scottish Parliament by the British government (some might say the recall of a parliament it closed down in 1707) reflects acceptance of a two-tier system for Britain (though, as a later section argues, with a vital ingredient missing). The importance of a similar two-tier system where Britain's relations with the rest of Europe are concerned is less clearly recognised.

The 'British Union' and the European Union – a Comparison

The initial moves that eventually led to the formation of the European Union arose out of the terrible trauma of World War Two. They were moves designed to solve a particular problem, that of allowing Germany to recover economically without letting it become too powerful again politically and militarily. In the years immediately following the war a resurgent Germany was as much a concern, to France in particular, as was the threat posed by the Soviet Union, which was after all a recent wartime ally. It was clear that without German economic recovery (avoiding the reparations that had so crippled it after World War One) European economic recovery would be stymied. But it was also clear that a Germany which had bounced back from economic depression to become a military superpower during the inter-war years might very rapidly become a threat to peace all over again. The choice was between security in poverty and insecurity in the midst of abundance. Neither prospect seemed attractive.

The solution was the ingenious one of placing German economic recovery under the auspices of a higher authority. In such a manner the original six countries that formed the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 committed themselves to the limited sharing of sovereignty which today remains characteristic of the EU and its 'supranationalism', arguably a unique feature of any major regional organisation worldwide.

However, trying to extend the principle of shared sovereignty to further areas proved highly controversial. In the early 1950s a coalition between Gaullists and communists managed to scupper the Pleven Plan, a French initiative for moving towards a sharing of sovereignty in the defence field. Churchill wryly commented that he didn't blame the French for rejecting their own idea, only for having it in the first place – but the point illustrates just how difficult it was, even for the original founders of the EEC, to share sovereignty in any area, let alone in areas of defence and foreign policy where nation states are likely to be particularly keen to keep absolute control for themselves. Learning their lesson, the advocates of shared sovereignty moved more cautiously from that moment onwards, concentrating on economic areas, an approach which bore fruit in the Treaty of Rome of 1957.

The 'British Union' developed in a very different way. The political process which led to the coming together of England and Wales in the 1530s, or the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, or for that matter the extension of that Union to Ireland between 1801 and 1922, bore no relation to the moves towards the sharing of sovereignty between nations as characterised by the formation of the EU. The developments within the 'British Isles' were essentially acts of annexation. It would have been unthinkable to allow Wales, Scotland or Ireland an independent foreign policy, when one of the grounds for 'incorporating' them was precisely to avoid them having power of their own in this area. This is an obvious point to make, and yet it is rarely recognised by those who talk glibly about 'threats from Brussels'.

It is important to emphasise this, because bringing nation states together through a limited sharing of sovereignty is necessarily a different exercise to taking apart a nation-state and resolving it into constituent parts that were once nation states themselves. There is bound to be a possibility that what was put together by force might be taken apart by force – that annexation would simply be followed by rebellion and separation. Following the end of the British Empire, it would seem to be time for the end of Britain *itself* as an Empire; Wales and Scotland seeking 'liberation' on the same basis as Kenya, India – or Ireland – before them.

The point is not that this is a likely outcome. The point is that a comparison between the two 'unions', European and British, makes clear that the former set out from a principle of shared sovereignty while the latter did not. From the very beginning what became the European Union recognised the need for a two-tier system, with European institutions, including a European Assembly (later a Parliament), working alongside national institutions. In that sense what came to be called 'subsidiarity' was built into the European system from the very start. It is true that in certain areas, such as defence and foreign policy, a purely intergovernmental system operates in which there is no sharing of sovereignty and member states can determine their own policies. Even here, however, they may choose to enter into forms of cooperation which involve some organisation at 'European level', for instance through the Rapid Reaction Force.

In the case of the British Union, on the other hand, where the process of devolution has moved power downwards, the two-tier system has emerged only gradually and in particular areas, largely the social and economic. What is more, as will be examined in the next section, a key ingredient in a genuinely two-tier system is missing in the British Union. However, as the commentators regularly say, 'the genie is out of the bottle'. Britain is arguably going to have to live with a two-tier system or cease to exist as a single nation state. It is being forced to impose upon itself a form of power-sharing that it has been largely inclined to dismiss at the European level.

The West Lothian Question

Given the relatively limited degree of autonomy enjoyed by Scotland vis-à-vis the rest of the UK, as compared to that of the UK vis-à-vis the EU, it is noticeable how much interest – and heat – has been generated by what devolution has been achieved so far. Not only has the SNP been able to parade the changes described above at its recent annual conference, but Scottish developments have generated a very strong reaction south of the border. Not unnaturally, these often focus on economic questions, and in particular on the notion that the sort of welfare provision now offered in Scotland can only be afforded through massive subsidies from the South. But the concerns go beyond that. Developments in the years since devolution began have generated a flurry of arguments on what are seen as the complicated constitutional issues involved. Given the traditional view about the British being 'empirically minded' and preferring 'common sense' to complex theoretical arguments and written constitutions, this is perhaps surprising. Yet it is also understandable. If a nation state is to be somehow 'unpacked' without being split up, then it is inevitable that some difficult choices will have to be made, while new arrangements and even institutions may have to come into being. The complex and much-mocked 'Brussels bureaucracy' will have to find its counterpart in London (and elsewhere in Britain) if the 'British Union' is to survive.

The biggest constitutional issue which has affected British politics following devolution is the so-called 'West Lothian Question'. The West Lothian Question was first posed during the 1970s, when Westminster first debated the creation of a Scottish parliament. Tam Dalyell, Labour MP for the Scottish constituency of West Lothian, asked how long English MPs would tolerate MPs from Scotland having a decisive influence on English matters, when English MPs had no say (because of devolution) concerning the same matters in Scotland.

The West Lothian Question has become even more important since Scottish devolution became a reality following the Scotland Act of 1998, and has nagged away at British (or at least English) minds ever since. Why should a Scottish MP be able to vote against an outright ban on smoking in public places in England, for instance, when the Scottish Parliament had already imposed such a ban in Scotland so that his or her own constituents could enjoy a smoke-free environment? Why should a Scottish minister vote for tuition fees to be paid by English students when the students in his or her own Scottish constituency could avoid them? Why should a Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Exchequer, both of whom currently sit for Scottish seats, be able to push through legislation, some of which they know perfectly well will not affect their own constituents? These questions seem to crop up every time controversial domestic legislation is passed, particularly if it is legislation that the Scots have been able to avoid.

The constant nagging presence of the West Lothian Question has put continuing pressure on British governments to find a solution, but they have not thought very clearly about what that solution could be. Dividing the UK into blocks of three to five million, each of which had the sort of devolved authority currently enjoyed by Scotland and (to a lesser extent) Wales is a possible future scenario, but there has so far been little enthusiasm for regional assemblies within England (a referendum in the North-East produced a clear 'no' vote against such an assembly in November 2004).

A reduction in the number of Scottish MPs, in order to provide a trade-off between their right to vote on English issues and their relatively small number, is unlikely to commend itself to those who will find themselves representing large and unwieldy constituencies (though there is some precedent for it in the arrangements made in Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972, when there was a parliament in Northern Ireland with a measure of home rule). It is difficult to see how a figure could be arrived at as a *quid pro quo* for being able to have a say in domestic English matters. Would one try to work out how much legislation was domestic, or how much parliamentary time was taken up with it? This would of course depend upon what was happening at the time – foreign affairs, for instance, have a habit of becoming important unexpectedly. Besides, the quota of Scottish MPs has already been reduced from 71 to 59, a reduction which was mooted in part as a response to additional powers through devolution, and has clearly not been seen as solving the problem.

A separate English Parliament to match that of Scotland and Wales is the other possible solution, (although some have arrived at the weaker notion of making certain matters subject to a vote of English MPs alone). It is interesting to observe that this idea is seen by so many in London as a recipe for turmoil. What if, goes the argument, a Labour majority government found itself unable to enact measures in areas like health, transport, education and the environment because of opposition from a Tory-controlled English Parliament, or if it found its policies frustrated by votes from a group of English-only MPs who could block a swathe of legislation for England. Commentators who make such remarks find it difficult to see how constant battles between a UK and an English Parliament could do anything other than hasten the end of the UK. Yet such battles between an English Parliament and a British Parliament over what was within the competence of each would be the closest parallel to the sort of arguments that frequently occur in the EU between Brussels and the member states. Those areas which remained exclusively the responsibility of the British Parliament would be like those areas which were covered by the 'first pillar' of Maastricht, the areas to which Community law applied. Those areas which the English (or Scottish) Parliament could determine would be analogous to the second and third pillar areas of Maastricht, the areas in which member states retained the sovereign right to determine policy.[3]

Such a division of responsibility at the European level evolved over several decades of co-operation. Could it be developing within Britain too? The Welsh and Scottish Parliaments already exist; what has yet to appear is an English Parliament. That this is the last piece of the jigsaw to fall into place is perhaps a reflection of English sensitivities rather than political logic – for it would require acceptance of the fact that England and Britain were not the same thing.

Ironically, there is one party which is toying very seriously with the idea of an English Parliament at the moment – the (on the whole) profoundly 'eurosceptic' British Conservative Party.

British Conservatives and Constitutional Issues

It is possible that Britain might be forced, in trying to maintain a 'British Union', to adopt some of the structures which it criticises so much in the EU. Nothing better illustrates this irony than the efforts of the British Conservative Party to respond to the West Lothian Question.

Since the Conservatives have tended to do better politically in England than in Wales or Scotland, there is an obvious political advantage to them in stressing the need for England to have a 'stronger voice' in British affairs. On the other hand, a party which still thinks of itself as the 'Conservative and Unionist' party cannot afford to look as if it is encouraging separatism. All moves to strengthen England's hands must therefore at the same time be seen as strengthening Britain's. But of course this is precisely the argument of those who try to sing the merits of the EU – namely that a strong Union strengthens rather than weakens individual member states.

In 1999 the then Leader of the Opposition William Hague talked of providing English consciousness with 'a legitimate political outlet'. The question however was, and remains, the nature of that 'political outlet'. For the Conservative MP Theresa Gorman there could only be one answer, expressed in the title of a pamphlet she wrote in the same year, *A Parliament for England*. Various publications issued by the Centre for Policy Studies (one thinks of Jocelyn Ormond's *A Proposal for Fairness and Transparency in a New Constitutional Settlement for Britain* written in 1998, or John Barnes' *Federal Britain No Longer Unthinkable*, published in the same year) have reached similar conclusions. Groups like the CEP (Campaign for an English Parliament) push along similar lines, wondering whether an English Parliament might be more suitably located somewhere in the Midlands or the North away from the 'British' Parliament in London.[4]

Proposing an English Parliament, however, is seen by many Conservatives as moving along a dangerous path leading to the possible break-up of Britain. They note the enthusiasm of the Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, for an English Parliament. They also note the hostile comments of Labour opponents who accuse them of supporting an English Parliament as "a stepping-stone to a federal state" (Lord Falconer) or a "threat to the Union'"(Harriet Harman). Hence many of them prefer a more cautious approach which talks of English Votes on English Matters (sometimes given the peculiar acronym EVoEM). This proposal was pushed by the Scottish Conservative Malcolm Rifkind in October 2007.

Rifkind's view is that the Speaker of the House of Commons should decide that a certain matter concerned 'England only' and in such cases refer it to an 'English Grand Committee', leaving the House of Commons to deal with whatever was left over. It is not difficult to see how problems could arise with this. Rifkind talks of 'English transport matters' being referred to the 'Grand Committee' – how then would a discussion of upgrading the East Coast (or West Coast) railway line take place? Would the 'Grand Committee' deal with the route as far as Berwick or Carlisle? Problems like this would arise on a daily basis, and it is hard to see how leaving the decision to a single individual, the speaker of the House of Commons, would be a satisfactory arrangement.

In any case, it is likely that Rifkind's 'Grand Committee' would soon wish its identity to be expressed more definitively. The 'political outlet' for English political consciousness spoken of by Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague may begin life as a 'Grand Committee', but it might soon start to doubt its own grandeur. It might ask why it, unlike its Welsh and Scottish Counterparts, was seen as an appendage of the House of Commons, why its business was determined 'arbitrarily' by the Speaker of that House, or why its location, unlike all the splendour lavished on new buildings in Cardiff or Edinburgh, was determined by the availability of rooms in the corridors of Westminster.

It seems reasonable to conclude that only a two-tier UK legislative system can provide the political outlet of which Rifkind spoke. Only a system of English, Welsh and Scottish Parliaments, existing alongside a British Parliament, provides an effective arrangement that both responds to English sensitivities and answers the West Lothian Question.

If this is true, however, something interesting follows from it. It means that in responding to those English sensitivities, the Conservative Party may find itself forced to adopt a more positive attitude towards the European arrangements that combine parliaments at the European and national levels – for that is precisely analogous to the sort of arrangement that it envisages for Britain itself. It is worth pointing out that the issue is to be mulled over by the Conservatives during the winter of 2007-8 by a so-called 'Democracy Taskforce' headed by Kenneth Clarke, one of the few 'europhiles' left in the Conservative Party. There is therefore some grounds for optimism that this taskforce will give a more positive view of the European Union than the current leadership (with David Cameron as Leader of the Opposition and William Hague as Shadow Foreign Secretary) is likely to adopt. Long wrangles in Parliament over the need for a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty may pull the Conservatives in the opposite direction during the early months of 2008. But at some point they will have to address the issue of the future constitution of the 'British Union'. When they do so, they might just find that the EU provides useful guidance.

Conclusion

Like the EU, Britain likes to stress that it is not over-riding the identity of its separate nations in bringing them together (with Northern Ireland) into a single 'United Kingdom'; not a European Union, but a British Union. And like the EU, with its flags and anthems, the UK sometimes over-reaches itself in its desire to be an all-inclusive community, as it toys with the idea of a new public holiday to celebrate 'community heroes' and demonstrate the 'power of belonging'. Such efforts are easy to mock, but they should not be undervalued. There is a necessary price, in terms of bureaucratic organisation and acceptance of various forms of interdependence, which has to be paid by any organisation that seeks to deal with powerful forces of national sentiment that can so very easily turn ugly.

This article has examined the situation in the UK because it appears to be (or at least sees itself as being) pulled in two different directions at once; by 'nationalist' forces within and what it all too easily dismisses as the 'pressure for a European superstate' without. What sort of comparison can be made between the two forms of pressure on this particular member state?

Anyone looking at arrangements for the distribution of power between nations in the European Union and in the British Union is likely to conclude that a two-tier system can best apply to both. The European Union's Institutions, with their particular spheres of competence, exist alongside national governments and administrations. Similarly, the UK is likely to evolve Scottish, Welsh and (eventually) English Parliaments whose spheres of competence will differ from, but sit alongside, those of the British Parliament. Doubtless there is a price to pay for this in terms of bureaucracy, cost and institutional power struggles. But it is surely arguable that a two-tier system strengthens both tiers of government.

The continuing pressure for Scottish and Welsh autonomy today will remind any government in London - Labour or Conservative - that there is more to the issue of power-sharing than 'winning concessions from Brussels' or 'losing power to the Scots'. The British have never quite perceived (or appreciated) that the 'European idea' was not to create a 'superstate' (If Europe's problem had been over-mighty states, why create a 'superstate'?) but to manage the power of individual states - and the quite proper patriotism tied up with them - by the sharing of sovereignty. The European Union is about finding a mechanism for states to co-operate, not about building more 'monster states'. This is the central rationale for two-tier systems.

Could this principle be accepted in the UK? Wrestling with the question of the Lisbon Treaty, Britain has to acknowledge that it has at the same time its own internal arrangements to sort out, and that these might one day require a British 'constitutional treaty'. If only because they have problems in maintaining a union of their own, the British may finally start to take the ideas of Schuman and Monnet seriously.

There are two 'extreme' outcomes of the twin debates in Britain. One is an EU without Britain and the other is a Britain without Scotland. Neither outcome seems likely at present, but the struggle to maintain the union of Britain requires 'the island' to think in a more profound way about the European Union. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that there could be a 'European' solution to a British problem[5], as there was once, over half a century ago, a European solution to a German recovery problem.

This article has not considered the very different circumstances applying in the many other member states of the European Union where centrifugal nationalist and regional forces are at work. But the study of one particular member state may be of some assistance in understanding how others could deal with similar pressures. If even Britain, with its strong tradition of go-it-alone self-confidence, is beginning to feel the need for such arrangements, that is surely an important (and positive) example for the rest of Europe.

Notes:

1. This is sometimes presented as a descent into unprecedented levels of fragmentation, but Europe has been in this position before. After the French Revolution and subsequent European wars the Holy Roman Empire formally disappeared (in 1806) and with it an enormous range of independent city-states, episcopal principalities and so on. Eric Hobsbawm analyses the culling of these 'dwarf states' in *The Age of Revolution* (Abacus, 1992), Chapter 4. He argues that the 234 independent territories of the Holy Roman Empire alone were reduced to 40 when the Empire was abolished in 1806 (see p. 114), an interesting figure when compared to the (upper limit of) 40 or so states that are expected to cover the whole of an enlarged European Union.

2. The complicated arguments over the 'Barnett formula' developed in the 1970s cannot be examined here. What is clear is that they are unlikely ever to be resolved, and this may itself add to pressure to allow Scotland independent control over the management of its economy.

3 The Reform Treaty modifies the 'three pillars' of Maastricht into a system where policy areas are divided into those where the EU has 'exclusive' competence, those where it's 'shared' with member states and those where it plays a 'supporting' role.

4. See its website, www.thecep.org.uk. Note how often its discussion pages contain the accusation that it is full of Conservatives.

5. There is, of course, the question of how far there has been a 'European' solution to the problems of Britain's relation to Ireland and the status of Northern Ireland. But I have not felt able to cover such a huge question here.