

A voice from the heart of Europe – an appeal for joint responsibility

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I am writing this open letter as one of many Europeans who are deeply concerned about the fate of Britain and the whole of Europe, our common homeland.

I was born in Czechoslovakia, I teach at Charles University in Prague, and have been an admirer and lover of British culture since my youth. My first acquaintance with Britain was as a student in 1968. After the fall of communism I lectured in Oxford and Cambridge and received the prestigious Templeton Prize in London in 2014.

I am due to be awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford University on 22 June – on the eve of a momentous decision that can influence the future of Britain and the rest of Europe for centuries. My parents' generation can remember the British government's decision at the Munich Conference of 1938, at a time when the voice of isolationism, insisting on "the national interest" prevailed in Britain. Prime Minister Chamberlain rejected solidarity with Czechoslovakia – "a far-away country ... people of whom we know nothing" – which was then the last island of democracy in central Europe, in the belief that he was preserving peace. But, as always, isolationism and national selfishness had tragic consequences for Britain and the whole world.

My parents' generation – who, in common with many in central and eastern Europe today, had a love of Britain – were profoundly disillusioned and aggrieved at that time by British isolationism.

The bell of treachery is tolled,

and whose hands rang the knell?

*La douce France and Albion the bold,
and yet we loved them well!*

the Czech poet František Halas wrote on that occasion. For many the British and French display of national egoism meant a loss of trust in western democracy and many turned in desperation to Soviet Russia. To this day the Communists make use of the "Munich betrayal" in their anti-western and pro-Russian propaganda. Nevertheless hundreds of Czechoslovak and Polish airmen subsequently fought and died in the Battle of Britain, firmly convinced that Britain and the countries of central Europe had a common homeland –Europe, and that they must stick together through thick and thin.

Today, more than ever before in our history, the great dream of the best sons and daughters of Europe: the centuries-old yearning for a unified Europe, is only a short step away from accomplishment. The firm unity of Europe has never been as important as now.

Two dark powers are waging an intense propaganda war against Europe aimed at weakening its unity and undermining the European Union. First of all it is the so-called "Islamic State"; the "jihadists" realise that Europe will be able to confront terrorism and solve problems relating to the wave of refugees only if it does so in unity, firm cooperation and mutual solidarity.

The current Russian rulers are doing everything in their power to weaken the European Union and achieve the imperial dreams of czarist and Soviet Russia of having a powerful influence in Europe and dominating neighbouring countries. It is by no means fortuitous that Russia is now led by a former secret police agent – ever since czarist times, throughout soviet rule and now under Putin's regime the secret police have been the most powerful and decisive force in Russia. Putin lends support to nationalist and extremist forces all over Europe. "Brexit", which would mean the beginning of the end for Great Britain, because in isolation "little

Britain” would have considerably less clout in the world – would represent a major victory for Putin’s plans.

I appeal to the citizens of Britain from the bottom of my heart not to let the bell of treachery sound once more. Don’t kill the hopes of generations, the great centuries-old dream of European unity. The collapse of the European Union would not bring about the “sovereignty of nations”, but instead mounting chaos and the threat of internal conflicts and local wars.

The European Union as it now stands naturally has many weaknesses and deficiencies. But this is an opportunity and challenge for a joint endeavour to improve and regenerate it, and not cowardly evasion of our shared responsibility. Citizens of Britain, please opt boldly to reject the temptation to betray Europe, our common homeland.

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