

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 8, Issue 4 (2012)

The UK: 40 Years of EU Membership

Helen Wallace *London School of Economics and Political Science*

This chronology was commissioned by the *European Parliament Information Office in the United Kingdom* and has been published here with their kind permission and that of the author.

Professor Helen Wallace DBE, FBA is an Emeritus Professor in the European Institute at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Citation

Wallace, H. (2012). 'The UK: 40 Years of EU Membership', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 8 (4), pp. 531-546.

Published in: www.jcer.net

KEY DATES

A chronology of significant events in British history, including the years leading up to accession on 1 January 1973.

19 Sep 1948	Winston Churchill: Zurich speech calling for a United States of Europe
7 May 1948	The Hague Conference, leading to Council of Europe, 140 British among the 800 participants
1950-1	Schuman Plan leading to European Coal and Steel Community: UK rejected invitation to join
1955	Messina Conference of the Six (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands) agrees to develop a common market and atomic cooperation via the Spaak Committee, which Russell Bretherton joined until withdrawn by UK government
1957-8	UK seeks to negotiate wider free trade area through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, but negotiations fail
Jan 1960	Founding of EFTA (UK along with Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland)
1961-3	First UK application for membership of European Communities, negotiations led by Edward Heath
14 Jan 1963	First de Gaulle veto of UK accession
Oct 1964	Election of Labour Government (majority of 4) with Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, re-elected in March 1966 with larger majority, but divisions in cabinet and party over Europe
2 May 1967	Second UK application for membership of EC
27 Nov 1967	Second de Gaulle veto of UK accession
June 1970	Election of Conservative Government with Edward Heath as Prime Minister
1970-72	Successful accession negotiations (UK, Denmark, Ireland and Norway)
Jul 1972	European Communities' Act passed to incorporate European law in the UK, after stormy passage in Commons
1 Jan 1973	UK accession
1973-6	First two Commissioners from UK: Christopher Soames and George Thomson
1974	Election of minority Labour Government (-33 MPS) in February with Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, re-elected in October 1974 with tiny majority of 3, and persistent divisions on Europe

1974-5	UK renegotiation of terms of accession (including a flawed mechanism to limit budget contributions) completed at Dublin European Council of March 1975. Terms agreed in Cabinet with several ministers voting against, and in Commons with Conservative support but a much divided Labour Parliamentary Party. Collective cabinet responsibility suspended for the subsequent referendum
30 Nov 1974	Helmut Schmidt's speech to Labour Party Conference strengthens pro-European opinion
Feb 1975	Lomé Convention brings former British colonies into aid and trade relationship with EC
5 Jun 1975	UK Referendum on question: Do you think the UK should stay inside the European Community (Common Market)? Cross-party campaigns on each side. Turnout: 64.5%; Yes: 67.2%; No: 32.8 %; two regions of Scotland had 'no' majorities.
Jan-Jun 1977	1st British Presidency of EC Council
1977-81	Roy Jenkins as President of European Commission and Christopher Tugendhat as second Commissioner from UK
27 Oct 1977	Roy Jenkins' speech in Florence supporting EMU May 1979 Election of Conservative Government with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister
1979	EP elections: turnout 31.6%; Conservatives 60 MEPs; Labour: 17; one each SNP, DUP, SDLP, and OUU
Feb 1979	Cassis de Dijon case before European Court of Justice which argues that mutual recognition of standards is legally correct, key prelude to single market
Mar 1979	Exchange-rate-mechanism of European Monetary System established – UK does not join till later
Dec 1979	Dublin European Council at which Margaret Thatcher asks for her 'money back'
Jan 1981	Greece joins EC
25 Jan 1981	Limehouse Declaration by Gang of Four (including Roy Jenkins) who leave Labour Party to found Social Democrat party, partly because staunch pro-Europeans
1981-4	Christopher Tugendhat continues as Commissioner and joined by Ivor Richard
Jul-Dec 1981	2nd British Presidency of EC Council, which includes London Declaration aiming to strengthen European foreign policy cooperation
1982	Falklands War between UK and Argentina. UK backed by EC economic sanctions on Argentina
Apr 1982	UK tries unsuccessfully to invoke Luxembourg Compromise in order to veto agricultural price package in Agriculture Council

Jun 1983	Re-election of Conservative Government with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister; Labour Party campaigned for withdrawal from EC
Jun 1984	EP elections: turnout 32.57%; Conservatives 45 MEPs; Labour 32; one each SNP, DUP, SDLP, and OUU
Jun 1984	Fontainebleau European Council agrees rebate mechanism for UK on budget payments and Margaret Thatcher presents paper on 'Europe – the Future'
1985-8	Jacques Delors becomes President of the European Commission, with Stanley Clinton Davis and Lord (Arthur) Cockfield as Commissioners from UK
Jun 1985	Single Market White Paper calling for its completion by 1992 presented by Lord Cockfield; Milan European Council endorses with strong UK support, but also calls for treaty revision against the protest of Margaret Thatcher 1985/6 Negotiation of Single European Act, which comes into force July 1987, promoting single market, and extending use of qualified majority voting and powers of European Parliament
1985	Greenland holds referendum on EC membership and withdraws though retains connections as result of its status within the Danish Realm
Jan 1986	Portugal and Spain join EC
Jul-Dec 1986	1986 3rd British Presidency of EC Council
Jun 1987	Re-election of Conservative Government with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister
1987-89	Henry Plumb as President of the European Parliament
1987-97	David Williamson as Secretary-General of Commission
Apr 1988	Labour Party recommits to EC membership
Jun 1988	Delors-1 budget package agreed after tough negotiations which retain UK rebate
8 Sep 1988	Jacques Delors' speech to TUC at Bournemouth
20 Sep 1988	Margaret Thatcher delivers her Bruges speech, which sets out her core view of Europe (including openness to eastern Europe and stronger role for collective European defence, as well as criticising the excessive and intrusive zeal of the Commission)
1989-95	Leon Brittan and Bruce Millan as Commissioners from UK
Jun 1989	EP elections: turnout: 36.2%; Labour 45 MEPs; Conservatives 32; one each SNP, DUP, SDLP, and OUU; Greens score 14.5%
Oct 1989	Nigel Lawson resigns as Chancellor of the Exchequer, partly because of disagreements over European policy
9 Nov 1989	Fall of Berlin Wall

1990-1	1st Gulf War, with UK and France with the US as major protagonists in a coalition including several other European countries
1990	Two plus Four negotiations over the future of the German Democratic Republic, during which Margaret Thatcher makes clear her preference for avoiding early unification
3 Oct 1990	German unification
6 Oct 1990	Sterling joins exchange-rate-mechanism of EMS
Oct 1990	Rome European Council at which Margaret Thatcher declares that UK will never join a single currency
13 Nov 1990	Sir Geoffrey Howe delivers resignation speech as Deputy Prime Minister with fierce criticism of Margaret Thatcher's European policy
22 Nov 1990	Resignation of Margaret Thatcher, who is succeeded by John Major, who commits to put UK 'at the heart of Europe'
1991-2	Negotiation of Treaty of Maastricht, which provides for economic and monetary union – with an opt-out provision for the UK, develops the 'three pillars' for EU policies, extended the powers of the European Parliament and exempts the UK from some employment provisions through a Social Protocol.
Apr 1992	Re-election of Conservative Government with John Major as Prime Minister
Jul-Dec 1992	4th British Presidency of EC Council
1992-5	UN-sanctioned peace-keeping operations in Croatia and then Bosnia Herzegovina, including the UK and many other European countries
Apr 1992	Conservative Party joins European Peoples' Party group in European Parliament in period of its rejuvenation as main centre-right group
Jun 1992	Danish 'no' vote on Maastricht in referendum, reversed after special decision of Edinburgh European Council of Dec 1992 by a second referendum in May 1993
17 Sep 1992	Black Wednesday – UK withdrawal from ERM (David Cameron an adviser to Norman Lamont, then Chancellor of the Exchequer)
Dec 1992	Edinburgh Council endorses Delors-2 budget package, which retains UK rebate. Also confirmed agreement that European Parliament work among three locations in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg.
1995-1999	Leon Brittan continues as Commissioner and joined by Neil Kinnock
1993	Foundation of Eurosceptical United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

20 May 1993	Maastricht ratification in the UK contentious at several stages, with some Conservative rebels on the treaty as a whole, and Labour and Liberal Democrat criticism of the UK opt-outs, forcing the Government into a confidence vote to complete ratification. Many calls for a referendum and emergence of vocabulary of repatriation
Jun 1993	Copenhagen European Council endorses process leading to eastern enlargement with strong UK support
1 Nov 1993	Maastricht enters into force
Mar 1994	UK presses for modification of Council voting practice to maintain scope for 'blocking minorities' after enlargement and the Ioannina compromise is formulated.
Jun 1994	UK vetoes choice of Jean-Luc Dehaene as next President of Commission and Jacques Santer chosen instead
Apr 1994	WTO Marrakesh Agreement signed, key role of Leon Brittan as Trade Commissioner
Jun 1994	EP elections: turnout 36%; Labour 62 MEPs; Conservatives 18; Liberal Democrats 2; SNP 2; one each DUP, SDLP, OUV; Greens drop back to 3%
1994	Schäuble-Lamers (German Christian Democrats) paper calling for hard-core EU
1995	EFTA enlargement with UK support
1995	BSE problem flares up as other EU countries impose ban on imports of UK beef
Jun 1995	Joint (Anglo-French) Air Defence Group created
1995	As treaty reform is mooted, John Major under pressure from Eurosceptics colleagues resigns to fight leadership and is re-elected
1996	Continued blocking of UK beef exports to rest of EU after asserted link of BSE to a human variant, leading to a UK policy of 'non-cooperation' in Council on all issues subject to unanimity rule, eventually resolved at Florence European Council
12 Nov 1996	ECJ judgement that the Working Time Directive was correctly based on health and safety provisions and hence applies to UK
1997-2007	Julian Priestley as Secretary General of the European Parliament
May 1997	Election of Labour Government with Tony Blair as Prime Minister UK election (Lab 419; Con 165; Lib Dem 46; others 29; Referendum Party 3% of vote)
May 1997	Treaty of Amsterdam: incoming UK government reverses social protocol; extension of justice and home affairs and incorporation of Schengen Agreements, with opt-out provision for UK and Ireland allowing later opt-in subject to unanimity of other member states; 'flexibility' provisions included to enable certain decisions by reduced number of member states faced with reluctance of others. Comes into force October 1997

17 Jul 1997	Gordon Brown announces 5 economic tests for UK membership of EMU
Jan-Jun 1988	5th British presidency of EU Council
1998-9	Kosovo intervention by Nato including UK and various other European countries
1998	UK signs up for positive EU agenda on environmental issues and plays active part in Kyoto Convention discussions
Jan-Jun 1998	5th UK Presidency of Council and in this period Labour Government of Tony Blair pursues strategic review of UK European policy, including strengthening of bilateral relations with other member states and of foreign and security policy
4 Dec 1998	St Malo agreement between UK and France to press forward with European defence cooperation
1998-99	Agenda 2000 EU negotiations linking budget and enlargement reach agreement at Berlin European Council in March 1999, again retaining UK rebate, and showing emergence of 'net contributors' club' of member states
1999	Softening of UK position on JHA and Schengen, but continued arguments over EMU with hardening of organised opposition partly via 'Business for Sterling' and creation of 'Britain in Europe' as cross-party pro-EMU platform
Mar 1999	Resignation of Santer Commission in response to claims of wasteful expenditure and fraud
Jun 1999	EP elections: turnout 23%; Conservatives 36 MEPs; Labour 29; Liberal Democrats 10; UKIP 3; SNP 2; Plaid Cymru 2; Greens 2; NI parties 3. NB first significant results by UKIP. First EP elections in UK under proportional representation system
1999-2004	Neil Kinnock continues as Commissioner and joined by Chris Patten
Oct 1999	George Robertson becomes Secretary General of Nato: period of closer cooperation between Nato and EU
Dec 1999	Helsinki European Council further endorses enlargement and sets headline goal of developing European Rapid Reaction Force
Mar 2000	European Council adopts Lisbon Strategy (for economic growth) with keen UK support
6 Oct 2000	Tony Blair's speech in Warsaw calling for stronger Europe as 'union of states' able to play more effective role in the world and strong transatlantic relationship (one of a series of strongly pro-European speeches)
7 Dec 2000	EU institutions 'proclaim' Charter of Fundamental Rights, drafted by a European 'Convention', a procedural innovation. UK has reservations about giving it legal status, though this was accorded under the Treaty of Lisbon

Feb 2001	Treaty of Nice agrees limited institutional adaptations for further enlargement, especially voting rules in Council and proposal to reduce number of Commissioners. Irish referendum in June 2001 rejected the Treaty, but a second referendum in Oct 2002 was positive. Treaty comes into force on 1 Feb 2003
Jun 2001	Re-election of Labour Government with Tony Blair as Prime Minister
Dec 2001	European Convention established, with membership from across EU institutions as well as member governments and national parliaments, and produced in July 2003 a draft Constitution for Europe, with wide-ranging proposals for institutional and legal changes. Text finalised in June 2004.
Oct 2001-	Nato-led intervention in Afghanistan with contributions from every EU member state except Cyprus and Malta as well as other European countries
1 Jan 2002	Eurozone comes into existence as euro replaces currencies of participating countries
Mar 2003-	Intervention in Iraq, led by US and UK with support from many other European countries, but strong opposition from France and Germany
2004 and 2007	Eastern enlargement of EU with strong UK support
20 Apr 2004	Tony Blair commits to a UK referendum to ratify the Constitution for Europe.
Jun 2004	EP elections: turnout 37.6%; Conservatives 27 MEPs; Labour 19; UKIP 12; Liberal Democrats 12; Greens 2; SNP 2; one each DUP, Sinn Féin (replacing SDLP), OUU
Jun 2004	Tony Blair successfully proposes Jose-Manuel Barroso as President of Commission against Franco-German preference for Guy Verhofstadt
2004-2009	Under revised rules Peter Mandelson is the single Commissioner from UK, serving until Oct 2008, when replaced by Catherine Ashton
May 2005	Re-election of Labour Government with Tony Blair as Prime Minister
May-Jun 2005	French and Dutch referendums reject Constitution for Europe
23 Jun 2005	Tony Blair's speech to European Parliament calling for a renewal of EU policies to meet new circumstances, including importance of economic growth agenda and enhanced defence capability
Jul-Dec 2005	6th British Presidency of EU Council
Dec 2005	European Council agrees Financial Perspective 2007-11 budget deal, retaining UK rebate
Jun 2007	European Council abandons Constitution for Europe and proceeds instead by IGC to negotiate more limited treaty amendments

Dec 2007	Treaty of Lisbon signed focusing on institutional adaptations, including: incorporation of Charter of Fundamental Rights; more powers for European Parliament; some powers for national parliaments to show an orange light to Commission proposals; appointment of a full-time President of the European Council; expanded role for the High Representative of the Union for foreign and security policy (based also in Commission and with creation of European External Action Service); and jurisdiction given to European Court of Justice after 5 years' transition over justice and home affairs issues, on which UK has to decide whether or not to opt-in or to opt-out completely, with residual option to opt-in on individual measures.
12 Jun 2008	Irish referendum rejects Treaty of Lisbon
Jul 2008	UK parliament ratifies Treaty of Lisbon after failed legal challenge to demand a referendum. David Cameron and Conservative Party favoured a referendum on Lisbon, though in 2009 stated that only practicable if ratification process by other member states incomplete
Autumn 2008-	Banking and then eurozone crises
Dec 2008-	EU Operation Atalanta by EU Navfor, with operational HQ at Northwood, UK and a British commander and cooperation with naval forces from some non-EU countries
Jun 2009	EP elections: turnout 34%; Conservatives 25 MEPS; UKIP 13 (second place in terms of votes); Labour 13; Liberal Democrats 11; Greens 2; BNP 2; SNP 2; one each DUP, SDLP, OUU; Conservative MEPs withdraw from European Peoples' Party to found European Conservatives and Reformists
2009-	Catherine Ashton as Commissioner from UK becomes High Representative for foreign and security policy. British MEPS, Sharon Bowles and Malcolm Harbour, chair key EP committees on economic and single market issues
2 Oct 2009	Second Irish referendum accepts Treaty of Lisbon
1 Dec 2009	Treaty of Lisbon comes into force, but nb constitutional court challenges in the Czech Republic and Germany
May 2010	UK election produces hung parliament after which the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition was formed, including commitment on Europe to play 'leading role', but no further transfer of powers without referendum, amendment of European Communities Act, review of balance of competences, and stay outside Euro
Nov 2010	Lancaster House Treaties between UK and France on security and defence
Mar 2011	Intervention in Libya, with key roles of France and UK and involvement of several other European countries

- Jul 2011 European Union Act passed by UK parliament which: requires referenda to endorse significant amendments of EU treaties; requires primary legislation to implement certain EU provisions, especially those involving the passerelle procedure; and restates UK parliamentary sovereignty
- Dec 2011 European Council to discuss eurozone crisis resolution at which David Cameron blocks proposal to resolve through new arrangements under EU treaties
- Jul 2012 Government announcement of the Review of the Balance of Competences, to assess the impact on the UK of EU policy powers across the range of government responsibilities, and to be completed in autumn 2014

THE NARRATIVE

An overview

The relationship between the UK and the European integration process is complex. The European Community (EC), later European Union (EU)¹, emerged as a continental project which has developed into a process of deeper and deeper integration across the years. Successive British governments, backed by British public opinion, have generally supported a shallower version of economic and political integration. However, in several areas the UK has been among the leading proponents of more far-reaching collective action by the EU. British policy has strongly favoured greater trade liberalisation both within Europe and internationally. The UK has repeatedly supported the enlargement of the EU to enable other European countries to benefit from EU policies and to stabilise the security of the continent. Over the past decade the UK has been among the firmest proponents of measures to protect the environment and to combat climate change. The UK has consistently led the way in pressing Europeans to take more seriously their foreign and defence policy responsibilities. New integration initiatives however have generally come from others, leaving the UK to engage reactively rather than proactively. The UK chose not to join the eurozone or to enter the Schengen Agreements. There has been repeated British criticism of some EU policies, such as those for agriculture, fisheries and employment measures, as well as the budgetary arrangements. Overall the UK has found it difficult to settle into a steady pattern of engagement within the EU.

A liberal economy

The extent of British economic interdependence with other European countries became pronounced from the mid-1950s onwards as the patterns of international trade evolved. Broadly the trend has been for some 50% or so of British exports and imports to be traded with other EU countries, with some variations year on year, including the effects of exchange rates and of economic circumstances in both EU and non-EU countries. British policy has promoted free trade and open markets in Europe and in the broader international economy. The UK has firmly supported trade liberalisation within the GATT and the WTO and the role of the EU in pressing for this. Trade Commissioners from the UK, notably Leon Brittan and Peter Mandelson, played important parts in this process.

British policy-makers and industrialists were among the first to press for the deepening of free trade within the EU and in particular for the creation of the Single European Market (SEM) by 1992. Lord Cockfield designed in detail and piloted the 1992 project for the Delors Commission in 1985-88. The Kangaroo Group in the European Parliament, led by Basil de Ferranti MEP, gave keen support. British expertise and experience played an

enormously important part in underpinning this process, with Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister an influential advocate. During the 1990s proactive British policy served to ensure that the SEM would include the countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) through the European Economic Area (EEA) and that the emerging democracies of central and eastern Europe could achieve full integration within the SEM. Leon Brittan, as the responsible Commissioner from the UK, played a central role in operating the complementary rules of competition which aim to ensure a level-playing field in the SEM. The SEM has generated well-evidenced benefits for the EU and for the economic interests of the UK. The SEM remains incomplete, as new issues arise and new service and industrial sectors emerge. British policy remains firmly committed to strengthening the SEM.

Successive British governments have supported collective EU efforts to promote growth-inducing initiatives, including the shift of EU expenditure to areas such as the research and development programmes. However, a defining feature of UK economic policy during the 1980s was the move to make the labour market much more flexible. This put the UK at odds with plans within the EU to develop a version of 'social Europe' that involved more extensive regulation of labour markets. Hence the Conservative Government voted against a series of measures such as the Working Time Directive (first version 1993), from which it secured a partial opt-out, and also insisted on the Social Protocol of the Treaty of Maastricht to exempt the UK from plans to reinforce the social dimension. In 1997 the incoming Labour Government reversed the Social Protocol in order to opt in to the Employment Chapter. The issue of EU employment legislation remains, however, among the most contentious for the UK and is at the top of the Conservative Party's targets for repatriation.

The creation of an economic and monetary union (EMU) proved a step too far for the British. Proposals for EMU had been discussed since the Werner Report of 1970. Roy Jenkins, as President of the European Commission, helped drive the project forward, through his Florence speech of 1979. The UK had, however, declined to join the exchange-rate-mechanism in March 1979 and did not join until October 1990, only to withdraw under severe currency market pressures in September 1992. In the negotiation of the Treaty of Maastricht (1991/2) the UK government secured an opt-out from the EMU provisions and the creation of the eurozone. Some British objections consisted of root-and-branch opposition to the proposal – this included a significant section of opinion within the Conservative Party. For others, notably in the Labour Party, the issue was the divergence between the UK and the continental business cycles, which led Gordon Brown to set out five economic tests to be met for the UK to enter the eurozone. In the 1997 election Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestoes promised a referendum to approve any recommendation for EMU membership. Since then no UK government has wished to recommend this, and the eurozone crisis has made any such move even more improbable.

The budgetary issues

By the time of UK accession in 1973 the basic arrangements for the EU budget were in place, with spending overwhelmingly concentrated on agricultural price support and a revenue system of 'own resources', the net effect of which was that the UK was from the outset destined to be a net contributor. Transitional measures to soften the impact were agreed but wound down during the 1970s. The renegotiation exercise of 1974/5 produced palliative measures which failed to correct the underlying problem. The outgoing Labour Government and the incoming Conservative Government in 1979 made it crystal clear that UK would seek a more durable solution. There followed a period of acrimonious negotiations, resolved at the Fontainebleau European Council of 1984, which established a durable UK abatement mechanism (the rebate) to reduce significantly the UK net contribution.

The UK has supported efforts to change the focus of EU spending programmes. In 1975 George Thomson, as Commissioner, piloted the Regional Development Fund, to stand alongside the Social Fund, which evolved into a package of structural and cohesion funds, destined for the less affluent regions of mainly less affluent member states. The UK has advocated reforms to the common agricultural policy, which now takes a much lower proportion of the EU budget. The UK has supported programmes to reinforce the EU's responsibilities for external action, including vis-à-vis its neighbourhood. Enlarged EU membership and shifts in revenue and expenditure have altered the pattern of the EU budget's distribution among countries. The UK remains a net contributor, with the continuing rebate alleviating the burden; other net contributor countries have become more active in seeking to moderate expenditure; and the number of poorer member states, the 'cohesion' countries, has increased.

In the 1980s the EU moved from a process of annual budgetary wrangles to periodic negotiations over a multi-annual financial framework, agreed by unanimity among the member states. At each such negotiation UK governments have tenaciously defended the rebate against critics who have sought to remove or to dilute it, but latterly with allies among the other net contributor countries. UK policy has sought continued changes to the pattern of expenditure within a constrained overall settlement. This approach carries strong support from across the political spectrum within the UK, where the debate is not about whether the UK should take a tough stance, but rather on how tough that stance should be.

Europe and its neighbourhood

UK policy has consistently recognised that enlargement of EU membership is the keystone of EU policy towards its neighbouring countries, in the 1970s and 1980s as southern European countries escaped from dictatorship and from 1989 onwards as the Soviet imperium crumbled. UK governments have been at the forefront of the EU debate in arguing the case for full membership of candidates, subject to sensible conditionality. Commissioners from the UK, notably Leon Brittan, helped to steer this forward with the proposals adopted at the Copenhagen European Council of 1996 which led to the 2004 enlargement in the teeth of French opposition. UK policy has also favoured maintaining membership as a realistic prospect for Turkey.

The UK, like other member states, was tested by the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. The EU as a whole was slow to agree on a collective approach. The eventual military intervention in 1995 was through the Nato framework, with UK forces actively engaged and the UK government much involved in the Dayton Agreement. Thereafter UK gave active support to the subsequent EU contribution to peace-making and peace-keeping. Paddy Ashdown served as the EU High Representative for Bosnia Herzegovina from 2002-2006. In response to the Kosovo War, Tony Blair was a leading proponent of the 'humanitarian intervention' which took place in 1999, again coordinated by Nato. Subsequently the UK within the EU has supported the process of stabilisation and the prospect of EU membership for the countries of the Western Balkans, as and when the necessary conditions can be met.

As regards the Mediterranean neighbourhood, historically the UK has been concerned rather with the Middle East than with North Africa. During the 'Arab Spring' in 2011, the UK became actively engaged. In the absence of a wider EU approach, notably as regards Libya, the British and the French played leading parts in the intervention by a 'coalition of the willing' to prevent the crushing of the anti-Gaddafi movement.

As regards JHA, despite remaining outside the Schengen Area, the UK has engaged with EU efforts to combat cross-border crime, terrorism and so forth, with active involvement in Eurojust (recent President Aled Williams from the UK) and Europol (current Director

Rob Wainwright from the UK). Under the Treaty of Lisbon the UK has to decide by 31 May 2014 whether to opt-in or to opt-out of provisions relating to police and criminal justice measures, in the latter case with the possibility of opting-in to individual measures. This question has become controversial, with the current coalition partners not yet agreed on how to proceed.

Wider international issues

The UK from the late 1970s actively promoted moves to develop European Political Cooperation, drafting the London Declaration of 1981, agreed during the UK presidency of the EU Council. UK governments have supported subsequent efforts to reinforce the Common Foreign and Security Policy. This chimes with the persistently active involvement of the UK in international action from the soft power end of the spectrum to the hard power end. As Commissioner Chris Patten improved the working relationship between the EU and Nato, as well as generally seeking more effective EU external action. UK governments have lent support to a series of EU coordinated actions to deal with security issues in Africa, currently including the Atalanta anti-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia which is coordinated from the UK military headquarters at Northwood. Catherine Ashton has continued to develop this role as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The British have been more circumspect about the role of the EU in the defence field. The questions for the British have repeatedly been: when and whether the EU as a whole would prove capable of action; what should be the division of labour between the EU and Nato; and when action would depend on a coalition of the willing, often involving the US. On the one hand, British governments have made efforts to develop European defence cooperation, as even Mrs Thatcher was prepared to entertain in the late 1980s (see her 1988 Bruges speech). More substantively Tony Blair worked to achieve the British-French St Malo Agreement of December 1998 to strengthen bilateral cooperation and to press for wider European cooperation on defence. This British-French approach was echoed in November 2010 in the Lancaster House Treaties committing to practical measures to strengthen military interoperability. On the other hand, there has been repeated British frustration as to the limits of collective European action and an enduring preference for working whenever possible through Nato. In the First Gulf War, in the Afghanistan intervention, and most contentiously in the military intervention in Iraq, UK governments were proactive in the operations, in all cases working closely with the US. In all of these operations a number of other European countries were involved in 'coalitions of the willing'.

As regards EU action to combat climate change and to address the wider international agenda on environmental issues the British position shifted in the 1990s from a rather lukewarm stance to a one of firm engagement. The UK government played a leading role within the EU caucus in the negotiations leading to the Kyoto Protocol of November 1997. Subsequent meetings have been slow to produce results. The UK remains committed to working with EU partners to make progress.

The politics of EU institutions and treaty reform

Over the years successive inter-governmental conferences (IGCs) have negotiated changes to the treaties. Recurrent issues for the UK have included: efforts to avoid competence creep of additional powers for the EU, including extended jurisprudence for the Court of Justice; the retention of unanimity voting in the Council in sensitive areas of policy; and protection of distinctive British interests, sometimes by opt-out arrangements.

In 1985 Mrs Thatcher was persuaded that treaty reform was necessary to drive the SEM forwards and the UK (both government and parliament) was a willing party to the Single European Act. Subsequent IGCs have been trickier for the British. In the 1991/2 IGC leading to the Treaty of Maastricht the UK government focused on the EMU proposals, contributing to the substantive discussion, while intent on securing a UK opt-out. The UK insisted on a Social Protocol to avoid the application of new social (essentially employment) measures. The ratification process in the UK was deeply contentious and generated a wave of calls for a referendum, spurred partly by the first negative Danish referendum on the Treaty. The IGC of 1996/7 leading to the Treaty of Amsterdam found the British Conservative Government intent on limiting its scope and insistent on an opt-out from the incorporation of the Schengen Agreements into EU law. The incoming Labour Government in 1997 held to the Schengen opt-out, but agreed to the broader development of EU activity in justice and home affairs (JHA), and to reverse the Maastricht Social Protocol. Ratification in the UK went smoothly. The IGC leading to the Nice Treaty, convened to deal with institutional issues to facilitate eastwards enlargement, was not controversial for the UK.

Subsequent proposals for further treaty reform became deeply controversial for the UK. The EU summoned in 2001 a Convention (with Lord (John) Kerr as its Secretary General) to meet in public, with participants from beyond the usual IGC format. The ensuing 'Constitutional Treaty' proposed far-reaching changes to the operating system and treaty structure of the EU, which provoked increasing clamours in the UK for a referendum. The ratification process was halted after negative referenda votes in 2005 in France and The Netherlands, before the UK had completed its parliamentary ratification process. A conventional IGC then negotiated what became the more modest Treaty of Lisbon. Difficult issues for the British included: the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into EU law, the provisions for opting-into/-out of JHA measures, and some procedural questions re the use of the passerelle clauses to enable certain steps to be taken by majority vote in the Council without the need for further treaty amendments. Ratification proved contentious in the UK, partly because the Conservative opposition disliked much of the content and partly because of the increasing demands for a referendum for its ratification.

The current coalition Government passed in July 2010 the European Union Act, which requires a referendum to ratify any future treaty reform involving a transfer of powers from the UK to the EU. In December 2011 the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, blocked the plan for EU treaty reform to anchor the fiscal compact for the eurozone, leaving all other member states (except the Czech Republic) to proceed instead by an inter-governmental treaty. More broadly there has been growing support for the calling of a referendum in one of two scenarios:

- i. a UK negotiation with other member states to alter the terms of UK membership, with options mooted, such as the Norwegian or Swiss forms of association, with a menu of repatriated powers, the plausibility of which remains to be tested; and
- ii. A decision on EU membership as such in the hope of settling the controversy within the UK.

British domestic politics and public opinion

Across the years of pre-accession, accession and post-accession the European issue has been contentious in British domestic politics among and often within parties. Contention has increased with: the emergence on the scene of the hard Eurosceptical United Kingdom Independence Party, which has made inroads into especially the otherwise Conservative-voting electorate; the continuing steps being taken by other EU countries

to support deeper integration against the widespread British preference for shallower integration; and the increasingly loud calls for resorting to referenda to resolve EU controversies. The UK now has a multi-party system in which the EU issue has become an important element in political competition. The prospect of an independence referendum in Scotland is an additional complication.

British public opinion reflects and conditions these controversies. As the Tables below show, British public opinion exhibits a three-way split on EU membership and on whether EU membership benefits the UK. At one end of the spectrum is a core constituency of support for the EU; at the other end of the spectrum is a core 'hard' Eurosceptical segment; in between lies a more volatile constituency which has over the years shifted back and forth between the two ends of the spectrum. This last has sometimes shifted towards a more pro-European position, as in the 1975 referendum on the terms of renegotiation; latterly more of this constituency has moved to a 'soft' Eurosceptical position. These developments beg the question as to whether it is the stances of the political parties which frame and drive public opinion or the constraints of public opinion that box the parties into their defensive positions on EU policies.

Table 1: UK Public Opinion on the European Union

Question: "Generally speaking, do you think that UK membership of the European Community (Common Market) is ...?" 1973-2010

Date	A good thing	A bad thing	Neither good or bad	Don't know
Sep-73	31%	34%	22%	13%
May-75	47%	21%	19%	13%
Apr-80	23%	49%	22%	6%
Apr-84	25%	48%	20%	7%
Apr-85	37%	30%	28%	5%
Apr-90	52%	19%	24%	5%
May-95	44%	20%	31%	5%
Jun-00	25%	24%	29%	22%
Jun-05	36%	27%	28%	9%
Jun-10	29%	33%	31%	7%

Source: *Eurobarometer*, used because it asked this same question from 1973-2011.

Table 2: UK Public Opinion in April 2012

Question: "Which of these statements do you agree with most, even if you don't agree with any entirely?"

Britain would be better off leaving the EU	33%
Britain would be better off staying in the EU but only as a member of a free trade area	36%
Britain would be better off staying in the EU as it is currently but not taking part in any further integration, even if other countries did	18%
Britain would be better off staying in the EU and playing a full role in any further integration	14%
NET: Staying in under varied scenarios	67%

Source: *Populus* for Policy Network

In conclusion

It is hard to draw up the balance sheet of the UK's forty years of EU membership. The British have been active proponents and beneficiaries of some EU policies and programmes but have consistently had reservations, sometimes major, about others. The tendency towards British exceptionalism has become more pronounced across the years and the patterns of partnership and alliance with other EU countries have fluctuated, not least as regards the key relationships with France and Germany, which have not delivered of the trilateral EU leadership of which there had been some hopes. When and how these controversies will be resolved is a matter of fierce current debate.

* * *

¹ The term EU is used generally in this text and encompasses the three founding European Communities.