



PETER HILL

Director, Strategy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Peter?

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Thank you, Thierry. I think there is no doubt that the external environment for us has got a lot worse over the past few years and some of the ideas that we had about the direction that history was going, we have got to look at again. It looks like a lot less benign environment for Europe than it has done over the past 25 years, whether that is to do with our neighbourhood or the wider international system. For a community based on law, which is the European community, and one that tries to manage power partly through the rule of law and cooperation, I think that is a particular challenge and that is something we have been struggling to deal with.

Are we under threat? Well, clearly, we face more threats than we probably have at any time in the history of the European Union, but how you deal with threats is a large part of how real those threats are. I think a lot of this comes down to our capacity and our resilience. My view, which may not be a universal one, is that I think when you look at the succession of crises that we have faced over the past certainly seven, eight years, the institutions and the processes that we have got have not done a bad job of performing the fundamental function of the European Union, which is to manage competing interests and tensions between member states.

I think they have been relatively successful. Things could have been a lot worse, and even in the migrant crisis that we are facing at the moment and all the difficulties that it poses, I think the institutions and the processes are playing a positive role, a stabilising role. It does not always feel like that, but I think underlying it, that is what is going on.

In terms, however, of proposing positive solutions, it is true that we are struggling and we will see over the next few months and years how we deal with it. I think it is inevitable that there will be a greater level of cooperation and integration in some areas and I am sure we will get into British questions later.

I think that for Brits, there is no doubt that it has become clear, if it ever was not, that we have a very strong interest in a strong and capable European Union, so even those who believe that Britain is better off out of the EU believe that a functioning, effective, integrated European Union, whether it is on financial and economic matters, whether it is in terms of justice and home affairs, is in the British interest. I think one moderate positive from developments over recent years is the sense that one can take some things for granted. I do not think we do so anymore.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Before you give the floor to Justin, was the referendum a good idea?

Peter HILL, Director, Strategy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Wow. Thanks, Thierry. That is a nice question. It became toxic, I think, in the British political system, a sense that repeated governments had given the impression that they were going to give the British people a say over some aspect of their European Union membership, whether that was over a specific treaty or other, and I think that this government felt that that was becoming an active hindrance to our participation in the European Union and that one way or the other, that question needed to be settled. You will have views about the timing, the nature, etc., but the idea that this had not become an underlying cross-party political issue I do not think is true. It had become a basic issue of the level of consent for European cooperation, which had eroded over the course of many years and which there now is an opportunity to settle.