

MICHAEL LOTHIAN

Member of the House of Lords, former Conservative Member of Parliament

Steven ERLANGER

Michael Lothian, Lord Lothian, we have a Brexit problem. Would you talk a bit about what that means for the EU and whether you think Boris Johnson, whose words are always taken with a big pound of salt, can maybe pull this off?

Michael LOTHIAN

I was rather pleased and surprised that we got this far around the circle without anyone having mentioned Brexit.

Steven ERLANGER

I know.

Michael LOTHIAN

I do not think that would have been the case last year.

Steven ERLANGER

As someone once said, we were afraid it was an infection, now we realize it is a vaccine.

Michael LOTHIAN

I think one of the problems why we do not talk about Brexit so much now is that none of now where we have got to. It is one of those great examples of three years of highly intelligent people negotiating with each other day after day and at the end of three years, coming and saying that they have got no solution. Possibly over the next few days we will find that Boris, with a flurry of words, will have found a solution but not one that I can see readily on the way. I think the other interesting thing is I do not have much difference with my colleagues here on the differences within Europe. I think we are all mainly agreed on that.

I think one of the elements I would like to highlight is that when we say why are these differences and why do they lead to populism, one of the reasons is on side there are what a lot of people feel are the elites, the intelligentsia. We heard today from Ana, I think, that in the end Europe through its intelligentsia must tell the people of Europe what they think they need. If you said to me what was it that caused Brexit in the first place, I would say largely that. There was a feeling in Britain and perhaps more widely that we were not being listened to. When I say we, I am not saying the politicians, the politicians were always playing and listening, but ordinary people and they eventually showed it in a vote. We have seen this in other countries where there have not been votes, so I wonder what the result would have been if there had been similar votes. They show it by getting out on the streets, by protesting or raising matters in parliament in a very unhelpful way. We have seen our parliament almost brought to its knees by parliamentarians, the so-called intelligentsia, trying to work-out a way through the present impasse.

I think we do have to go back fairly soon to saying to people, what is it that you look for from the European elite? Do you want to have some system where you can regularly be asked what you think, what you want us to do about it and we begin to answer that? It is the answering of that I think is the most important thing at the moment, more than Brexit. I think that there are two areas where we could already be working to establish a common ground, whether we are in Europe or outside Europe. One is intelligence, because there is so much sharing of intelligence at the moment, which is not bound to the European Union but done on a voluntary basis. We cannot see that endangered because that



would be very dangerous for the Western world as a whole. I think we should be working at structures within which we can properly share intelligence and if necessary, not share it when we cannot.

The second thing, which has come up before, is what was known as the European Army; I do not see it as that. I think there is a very big void now in Europe for a military force and I do not see it being a European one, for the reason that there are certain countries that would not want to join it. There are other countries that might well say the first time we had to take a decision as to what they should do, that they did not want to do it. We ought to now look at how we can begin to build a military force and a military establishment that brings in those countries that can really offer something positive. Those countries by and large, and we now within our hearts, are Britain, Germany and France and probably, in a certain sense, Poland as well. We should be looking now at how we begin to form a structure within which they can operate as a group, not in Europe, not necessarily in NATO, but as a group that has a common European strand.

Steven ERLANGER

Thank you very much.