

The EU and empires

Mr Verhofstadt (EU Liberal) warns us that the world is coalescing into empires. He thinks the UK has to join the EU empire as a counter to the Russian, Indian, Chinese and US empires .

This is not a very liberal outlook. He does not specify why the USA or India is any kind of threat to us, nor why the EU will always get on fine with Russia or China. It leaves out of account the many smaller countries worldwide that do not belong to any of these blocs or major countries and seem to prosper. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Singapore and many others seem to flourish outside the EU.

I also take issue with him over what is an empire. If empire is based on size and power, let us begin by comparing the UK with Russia. The UK's economic size is about a third larger than Russia's. If we look at naval power both countries have one aircraft carrier. Russia has 12 destroyers to the UK's 6, but only 10 frigates to the UK's 13. It is true Russia has many more submarines. The UK of course has her potential power greatly augmented by membership of NATO.

An empire is usually supposed to be a common government system with a single foreign policy and armed forces. It controls a wide range of different territories and former countries or governing units with varying degrees of devolved or delegated authority. There was the Roman empire covering much of southern and western Europe, the British empire with India at its heart, and the USSR empire stretching through much of eastern Europe and parts of Asia. The UK willingly renounced empire after the second world war, allowing the peaceful establishment of a number of independent nations. The USSR empire was troubled by internal revolts and too passed when the centre allowed free expression. The USA has always opposed the idea of conquest followed by occupation, though it has intervened militarily in support of regime change in various countries. India was created as a separate governing area from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on independence.

I find it worrying that a leading exponent of more European integration uses the word "Empire" to explain what they are trying to do. Most of us want no more empires. We believe in the free determination of peoples. Recent votes and campaigns tells us that if people want anything they want smaller governing units, as with the independence movement in Catalonia, the Brexit vote in the UK, the movements for separation in many parts of the world.