

James Gray's Weekly Gazette & Herald Column of 31st May 2018 and a response

Dear James,

Your "I spent my May Bank Holiday in Warsaw attending the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Unlike the EU, the principle behind NATO is one of voluntary membership, and of mutual assistance, rather than command from on high" is highly slanted. Your arguments are contrived against one particular (international) organisation. You are happy to see the UK contribute 2% of its GDP to NATO in which organisation it has no real authority (that being underwritten both financially and militarily by the USA) yet balk at contributing 0.75% (is it?) of GDP to the EU.

Your acclamation of the Roman Catholic Church and Malmesbury's "independence of mind" and "right of self-determination" indicate a certain, perhaps deliberate amnesia. The Roman Catholic Church, your "last, great pan-Global force" is presently mired in sexual scandal and was heavily implicated in aiding that Nazi domination you mention. But you're happy to support it? Your so-called independent and self-determining people of Malmesbury have no independence or self-determination when it comes to developments effectively imposed through the policies of your government via the Planning Inspectorate (this is the reality of David Cameron's "a fundamental shift of power to local people and local institutions").

No country is commanded to join the EU as you well know. There are countries queuing to join this alliance, at present these are Turkey and the Balkan states of Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, with Kosovo and Bosnia & Herzegovina waiting in the wings. With regard to the last-mentioned, the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia & Herzegovina is maintained by EUFOR, an EU force with EU commanders, and replacement for NATO's SFOR/IFOR. The UK contributes troops to this force as a member of the EU and may, perhaps, continue to contribute if and when Brexit comes about.

You will also know well, being a member of the five military panels that you list, that NATO's military commander is always American. As you indicate, without America's military might and finance, NATO if it still continued to exist, would be a shadow of the present organisation. And, of course it is, in these troubled times, continuously under threat from the unpredictable, but democratically elected (!) Mr Trump.

Talking of Mr Trump, both he and Mr Putin (also democratically elected!) desire to see the demise of the EU as it is a significant, strong economic counterbalance to the hegemony of Russia and (now, under Trump) the USA. As the old saying goes, you should be careful of what you wish for.

Sincerely

Paul Turner
Rudloe

From: GRAY, James <jamesgraymp@parliament.uk>
Sent: 01 June 2018 00:43
To: Mr P Turner
Subject: From James Gray MP - Italy, NATO and Malmesbury

Dear Constituent,

Political crises are to Italy as wet weather is to English Bank Holidays - hardly unexpected. Yet the current crisis threatens to have consequences for the whole Continent of Europe which will make Brexit look like child's play.

Political crises always have a complexity of origins and reasons, never more so than in the Machiavellian cess-pit which is Italian politics. Yet in the midst of it all, there is a clearly discernible Eurosceptic, populist theme. People do not like being bossed around by people who they have not elected, and therefore cannot remove from power. That is worsened by the Euro - Germany, and especially her banks, now dominate Italian life and demand stringency measures, which the

people simply do not recognise as being necessary. The election of a populist, Euro-sceptic party, which the Europhile President then chose to remove from power, may well have long-term consequences for the EU itself.

I spent my May Bank Holiday in Warsaw attending the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Unlike the EU, the principle behind NATO is one of voluntary membership, and of mutual assistance, rather than command from on high. That's why it works so well, although it may be at some risk from having too many low or non-contributing members. After Brexit, 80% of NATO's budget will be from non-EU countries, especially America, despite nearly all of the EU member states demanding the military comfort of NATO membership. It may be questionable how long that can last.

Warsaw is a different place to the war-stricken, grey, communist city it was when I last visited in 1979. Having escaped from NAZI domination from 1939-1945, and from Communist dictatorship from the USSR after that until 1989, I suspect that they too are Euro-realists if not sceptics at heart. Their true allegiance is to that last great pan-Global force, the Roman Catholic Church. It too is, of course, voluntary.

The fact is that in human governance 'big' is simply not necessarily 'best', and in most circumstances big is doomed to failure and collapse. What a contrast was the Malmesbury Mayor-making, which I was able to attend on Tuesday. The oldest English Borough; very probably the oldest democratic organisation in Britain, Malmesbury maintains her independence of mind, and her right of self-determination in a quietly proud sort of way. The Town Council, and its predecessor, the Old Corporation, the Warden and Freeman, or the Commoners of the Kings Heath go back to the times of King Athelstan 1100 years ago. "This twig and turf I give to thee as free as King Athelstan gave to me" as they intone at the introduction of new Commoners.

They have learned how to do things in Malmesbury over those 1100 years and longer. Italy, the EU, perhaps even NATO, could learn a thing or two from them.

Best wishes,

James Gray, MP for North Wiltshire

Member, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy
Member, Environmental Audit Committee
Member, Mr Speaker's Panel of Chairmen
Member, NATO Parliamentary Assembly
Chairman, All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Armed Forces
Chairman, Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust
Chairman, 1922 Defence Committee
Chairman, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Polar Regions
Younger Brother, Trinity House
Patron, Operation Christmas Box
President, Chippenham Constitutional Club
Author, Poles Apart (2014); Who Takes Britain to War (2016); Full English Brexit (2018) and Wiltshire to Westminster (2019)