

Lord David Howell - Address to the Jersey Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society,

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The EU and The Commonwealth

The European Union and the Commonwealth are not alternatives for Britain, whether economically or in security terms. They complement each other. But it can be said with certainty that, stay or leave the EU, the world-wide Commonwealth network is going to assume an ever-growing importance in Britain's affairs and prospects.

Why is this? The basic answer is because the modern hyper-connected world and the architecture of the modern Commonwealth are ideally suited. Unlike the EU , with its heavy and centralised top layer of intrusive administration and its governmental hierarchy of authority and control, the Commonwealth is a quite different kind of entity and structure.

It binds together not through officialdom and treaties but to a far greater extent through non-governmental and voluntary linkages and cohesion in short through its peoples. Connectivity brings together , on a daily and continuous basis, every kind of profession, activity and interest in a way that no imposed order from above can ever do.

Connectivity links up the doctors, the lawyers and court administrators, , the accountants, the scientists, the educationalists, the sportspeople, the creative artists, the health administrators, the authors, the artistic designers, the journalists, the vets and agricultural experts, the communications experts, the museum specialists, the parliamentarians, the women's rights movements, the young entrepreneurs, the architects, the ecologists and environmentalists, the archaeologists, the engineers, the city planners , even the expert trainers in security, in military matters and policing procedures.

And of course the cementing agency which brings all these people and interests together as never before in the Commonwealth context is the common working language (along with all the common attitudes and identities hidden within it).

Language allows the communication of complex ideas and cultural stances. It is the quintessential standard. In an age of information transfer and big data it creates a platform for trade and exchange like no other in the world. English has emerged as THE 'hub' language , bridging communications between other languages. When Asian 'tiger' economies meet to plan progress they talk in English. Even Chinese corporations are instructing their workers to use English , as a more powerful medium for innovating ideas than their own Chinese.

Are not we lucky, and are not we in the UK absurdly short-sighted and inept in failing to utilize the colossal potential of the Commonwealth connection today and the even greater potential tomorrow.? And is not HM The Queen more percipient than all her Ministers put together in seeing – as she forecast several years ago – that the Commonwealth was becoming 'in many ways the face of the future'.

Of course it is. In the age of the internet mesh, in the age of platform business models and blockchains, in the age of totally new trade flows and supply trains, it is becoming daily more obvious where our national assets lie and how they should be used and developed. The Commonwealth is not only offering the fastest growing new markets; it is not only generating investment capital and new skills

on a phenomenal scale. It is also the gateway to all the other rising powers of Asia and Africa and Latin America.

In addition it is the harbour and safe anchorage for dozens of small island states and communities who would otherwise be left out of the globalisation process. They, too, are loaded with potential, whether they be Crown Dependencies, British Overseas Territories, Commonwealth Realms or Republics. They are all part of the one family system, stretching across continents and faiths , which offers trust and cohesion in today's fragmenting world of violence and conflict which seems almost to be falling apart.

Under the last Secretary General, Kamelesh Sharma, the Commonwealth gave especial attention to the plight of many smaller island states. It is high time the British Government did the same, and time that the endless stream of negative measures and policies for smaller states emanating from Whitehall was replaced by much more supportive approaches, whether the subject is tourism, financial services, energy support, agricultural exports , local crafts and skills, or any other potential growth areas.

And let me end with one particular asset right here in front of me. The Crown Dependency and Island of Jersey is in fact a major and massive asset for the United Kingdom. It supports 140,000 British jobs and earns at least £2.5 billions a year for the UK Treasury.

Its record on openness about beneficial ownership is exemplary and long-standing. Instead of criticising and bemoaning such assets as 'tax havens' the opinion-formers and commentators in London should be reminding people how lucky we are to have such skills, resources and potential within our kingdom and nation or within our Commonwealth family. We should look after our assets, instead of denigrating or neglecting them.

Thankyou.

David Howell

[Note to Editors. Lord Howell is President of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Chair of the Council of Commonwealth Societies, former UK Secretary of State for Energy, former Minister of State for the Commonwealth, former chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, former chair of the Conservative Party One Nation Group, former Deputy-Leader of the Conservatives in the Lords. He is the author of several books including the Commonwealth-oriented 'Old Links and New Ties', published in 2013, and 'Empires in Collision' in 2016.]