

## **Text für das Oxford German Forum, Wolfgang Ischinger, 8. Januar 2013**

Recently, I was asked to write a few sentences about why “I want Europe” for a German initiative that promotes European integration. Despite all the problems of the past few years, it remains a remarkably easy question to answer. Our united Europe is the best Europe we have ever had. Hundreds of millions of Europeans living in peace, freedom, and solidarity – that’s an enormous, historic accomplishment.

But it’s not just the past, but the look into the future that shows us why the European idea is worth preserving and developing. Only together will we be able to successfully cope with the challenges of a globalized world and to help shape the international order according to our values and interests. How we secure the peace and how we fight against climate change, how we make trade rules and how we protect a free world wide web – for all that and much more, European states and societies will need a strong and functioning European Union to make themselves heard.

That is why, within the larger discussions about the future and purpose of Europe, the recent debates about the possibility of a British exit from Europe worry me. Britain’s experience in diplomacy and international affairs, its able military, its championship of free trade, and its function as a bridge over the Atlantic are critical assets. Without them, Europe in the future would likely take a more narrow, inward-looking, maybe even protectionist perspective. In the words of German journalist Jan Ross, the EU without the UK would be a “Europe with a shrunk horizon”. In other words, if Europe is to play the role of a major global player that is able to defend its interests and values in an increasingly complex and complicated multipolar international order, Britain will have to be an essential part of that. Another example: Attempts to pool and share (more) military assets in Europe – an absolute imperative for European defence policy – are hardly thinkable without the strong involvement of the United Kingdom.

However, Britain stands to lose even more should it opt for a course outside of Europe. ‘Independence’ from Brussels may for some feel liberating, but, in the medium and long run, would harm Britain’s prosperity and influence severely. Tony Blair deserves praise for drawing attention to these negative consequences of a British exit from the EU. Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski put it this way in a speech in Blenheim Palace in September of 2012: “Your interests are in Europe. It’s high time for your sentiments to follow. Your leaders need to make a more vocal case for your European interests.”

Making a vocal case for an unpopular cause is difficult – which makes open discussions about unpopular causes all the more important. The UK and Germany have always had different ideas about the shape and the purpose of the European Union. Bringing together these two perspectives is always a good idea. I would like to wish all of you at the Oxford German Forum thought-provoking debates about the future of Europe.

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