

Britain in Europe: A Response to Anand Menon

Written by John Redwood

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JOHN REDWOOD, MAR 27 2008

John Redwood's original editorial for e-International Relations, Britain in Europe in 2008: Big World, Bad Europe, Ugly Consequences was published in February 2008. Professor Anand Menon's response, Britain in Europe: A Response to John Redwood followed in early March. This editorial represents John Redwood's reply to the criticisms made of his original piece.

It is a pity that pro European Union apologists like Professor Menon demean their case by spiteful personal attacks and silly misrepresentation. His personal distaste comes out throughout the course of his casual remarks, as in his conclusion that "Redwood and his ilk should look beyond their narrow anti European prejudices".

I have no anti European prejudices. Europe is my continent, and I admire many of its cultural, architectural, scientific and political expressions. I enjoy travelling, hearing the music and learning from the literature, admiring the great paintings and standing in the buildings that represent the European achievement.

I do have a point of view about government and regulation which is shared by the majority of my fellow countrymen and women. There is too much government, it is too expensive and too prescriptive, and too much regulation which often achieves the opposite of what it sets out to achieve. Like President Sarkozy, I admire the creation of a great democracy in the UK over the centuries, and the spirit of freedom and global vision which characterises the British at their best. I am not a little Englander but a *big worlder*, responding to the huge changes of economic and political power of our century that come from the excellence of US technology and from the rise of mighty India and China.

Professor Menon sniffs at Conservatives offering a referendum on Lisbon for no good reason. We have always said further transfers of power to Brussels need the consent of the British people. Why is the Professor so afraid to make the case for the Treaty if he thinks it is so good for us? Why do so many people in the UK disagree with him?

He denies my point that debates over constitutional change reveal how undemocratic the EU has become. What more evidence does he need than the way the French and Dutch governments ignored the results of referenda in their countries, or the breathtaking way the UK government denied us the referendum they solemnly promised to win a General Election? He says that was the national politicians, not the EU – but as he should know, the EU is a political elite made up of present and former national politicians, some of them now Commissioners, and some Ministers in national governments pushing the EU agenda. It is this elite which has become so cut off from popular opinion in the UK, and who lost the referenda in France and Holland.

The Professor claims Lisbon reinforces national control. He should try reading the full Treaty, which sacrifices 50 national vetoes, some of them over important areas of national policy, and pushes us further towards a common foreign and security policy and a common criminal justice policy. Those are legitimate aims for those who want a country called Europe governed to a greater extent at EU level, but proponents should make an honest case, not deny this is happening.

He complains that post Northern Rock I want less financial regulation not more, as if it was obvious we needed more. We already have masses of regulation – far more now than years ago when we did not experience runs on banks in the UK. The issue to ask is why should we believe all this regulation is good for us, when we survey the current mess

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created by the Basel global framework and the EU regional framework of regulation in recent years? We need less and better, not more, and more levels of regulation. It is best to have global agreements, as financial services and banking know no regional borders.

He also thinks an EU common market needs a strong regional government. You do not need a common government to trade with people. You need willing buyers and sellers, and World Trade Organisation rules, which are now good at policing more open markets at least in industrial products. Unfortunately EU rules block up agricultural markets in ways which damage the interests of UK consumers and developing countries and have not yet been dealt with by WTO engagement owing to the unhelpful stance taken by the EU in trade negotiations.

Professor Menon and his friends should understand that people like me want better living standards for all the peoples of Europe, and want Europe to make its contribution to a more prosperous and happier world. We do not find the protectionist and power seeking policies of the European federalist political class helpful in pursuing these goals which is why we want a freer gentler Europe with less government, not more.

Anand Menon has replied to this article in 'Britain in Europe: A (Further) Response to John Redwood'

John Redwood is a visiting professor at Middlesex Business School and Member of Parliament for Wokingham. In the mid-1980s he was Chief Policy Advisor to Margaret Thatcher where he was a staunch advocate of her privatisation programmes. He has held numerous Cabinet positions and twice ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1995 and 1997.