Conservatives and the European Convention on Human Rights

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Convention on Human Rights and our country's adherence to it, along with the existence of the Human Rights Act 1998, has become a subject of division in the Conservative Party. In the Conservative manifesto of 2019, the Government stated: "After Brexit we also need to look at the broader aspects of our constitution: the relationship between the Government, Parliament and the courts……The ability of our security services to defend us against terrorism and organised crime is critical. We will update the Human Rights Act and administrative law to ensure that there is a proper balance between the rights of individuals, our vital national security and effective government. We will ensure that judicial review is available to protect the rights of individuals against an overbearing state, while ensuring that it is not abused to conduct politics by another means to create needless delays. In our first year we will set up a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission that will "examine these issues in depth and come up with proposals to restore trust in our institutions and in how our democracy operates".

To date, the only proposal that has been brought forward that looks to have an impact on the HRA is the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill. There has been no detailed discussion as to how the updating of the Human Rights Act can or will be done in a manner compatible with our continued adherence to the European Convention on Human Rights, or whether it is proposed that we should have to withdraw from the Convention itself. If we were to do so then this would terminate our membership of the Council of Europe, which on our leaving the EU remains for us one of the most important forums of European dialogue and co-operation.

This paper seeks to look at the background to this matter and how we have got to where we are. It also examines whether the current criticisms of the ECHR and HRA are justified and the likely benefits and costs of pursuing the Government's stated policy both generally in the context of Brexit and more specifically in respect of the Overseas Operations Bill.

2. BACKGROUND

The origins of the ECHR undoubtedly reflect British constitutional traditions of freedom and the Rule of Law that are accepted in the UK as the foundations on which good government should be conducted. It is suffused with principles that can be traced back to Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus and the Bill of Rights of 1689. The ten key rights originally protected by the Convention were with the exception of Article 8 on privacy and family life, a classic exposition of the liberties which successive generations of British politicians and the wider public routinely claim as our shared inheritance. This was why Sir Winston Churchill supported the creation of a United States of Europe in his famous speech in Zurich in 1946. Churchill promoted and supported the idea of a Council of Europe to act as a forum to prevent any recurrence of war and of the human rights violations which Europe had experienced during and in the run up to WWII.

But for all that, when the Convention itself was being promoted by a Conservative lawyer politician, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, in the late 1940s, adherence to it was controversial in the UK. The Convention was seeking to give concrete expression to the UN Charter, itself promoted by Eleanor Roosevelt as the Magna Carta of the 20th century. But there was anxiety about the UK being fettered by an international legal obligation that was in the last resort interpreted by an international tribunal. There was also tension between the UK preference for a detailed list of clearly defined rights and that of the French and some other nations for a general list of principles derived from the more abstract ideas set out in the Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen. Contemporary FCO advice to Labour Ministers showed characteristic caution. It said: "To allow governments to become the object of such potentially vague charges by individuals is to invite Communists, crooks and cranks of every type to bring actions."

Most Britons in 1950 considered that our Common Law and unwritten constitution offered a better level of protection than any continental model. So, in deciding to sign up to the Convention we were doing something new. We were intent, through the creation of rights we ourselves believed we already enjoyed as liberties, on setting a standard of behaviour for other states towards their citizens that could be universally applied. We were the first country to ratify the Convention in 1951 and Lord McNair, a British legal scholar of renown, became the first president of the Court of Human rights in 1959. Most importantly, we then came through another debate on the Convention in the mid 1960s when we recognised the right of individual petition. Interestingly the principle

advocate for this in Parliament was Terence Higgins, a right of centre Conservative MP, who wanted it as a check on curbs on freedom that a Labour government might be minded to introduce. This more, than anything else, provided the pre-condition for the transformation of the Strasbourg Court from an international tribunal, intended to deal with a limited number of cases into the institution it is today. It also made apparent the need to incorporate the ECHR, in some way, into our own domestic law to enable the rights to be claimed directly here.

In the run up to the enactment of the Human Rights Act there was much debate as to whether or not a homegrown Bill of Rights might be better than mere direct incorporation of the Convention into our law. That idea foundered because there was no agreed view as to what the scope of such a Bill of Rights should be. Some wanted socio-economic rights enforceable through the courts. Others, including the few Conservative lawyers who got involved, wanted to protect core liberties over and above those covered by the Convention, such as for example the right to trial by jury in England and Wales.

But the Conservative government of John Major found the issue far too divisive. A general position was taken that incorporation should not take place as it would undermine parliamentary sovereignty. When the new Labour government published its proposals and started to take them through the Commons, the Conservative response was ambivalent. The Bill was whipped against at Second Reading on the basis that the proposals were not properly thought through. At Third Reading the then Shadow Attorney General Nicholas Lyell QC persuaded William Hague that its principles and intentions were sound and it should not be opposed. But by 2006, when David Cameron became Leader of the Opposition, the Conservative position was entirely changed. Michael Howard had been seared by his experiences with the Strasbourg Court when he was Home Secretary, in deportation and extradition cases, which he considered an excessive fetter on executive discretion. The new leader had been Howard's Special Adviser and had witnessed these problems. Furthermore News International, with which he wished to build a relationship, in order to win in an election, was implacably opposed to the progressive development of privacy law which was one of the consequences of the HRA and it was leading a campaign against both it and the ECHR.

This was the genesis of Cameron's speech to the Centre for Policy studies in 2007 which committed the Conservative Party to repealing the Act. In it, he stated that there would be a British Bill of Rights to replace the HRA and that its wording and consequential interpretation by our own national courts would be sufficiently different for it to enable the UK to exploit to the full the "margin of appreciation" allowed by the Strasbourg Court in the

interpretation of the Convention by member states. This approach was based on the principle of "subsidiarity" in the Convention that recognises the right of signatory states to interpret and apply the Convention with differences reflective of national traditions. This it was thought might help the UK to prevent the Convention being used to create rights unintended by its creators. As Shadow Attorney General, Shadow Home Secretary and then Shadow Justice Secretary, I was tasked with producing a paper on how this could be done and a Commission was set up to look into this. It was agreed that any end product had to result in our continued adherence to the Convention. As a result when a position paper on it was produced at the end of 2009, it highlighted the difficulties involved and the very limited changes that could be done. But this did not prevent the Conservative manifesto of 2010 repeating the promise of action.

Under the Coalition Government, no changes could be made without the agreement of the Liberal Democrats. So the Government set up another commission under Sir Leigh Lewis to inquire into the matter. Its report came to no conclusion. It did set out the complete rejection of any change by all the devolved administrations in response to its consultation and the variance of views between commissioners on what a Bill of Rights might contain. Frustration at this lack of progress then seems to have prompted David Cameron to consider the far more radical removal of the need for compatibility with the ECHR and it was this idea that resulted in the Conservative Party paper of October 2014 which formed the basis of the Conservative manifesto statement in 2015.

In the paper, the intention of the Convention was lauded. But having done that it went on to say that "Both the recent practise of the (Strasbourg) Court and the domestic legislation passed by Labour (the HRA) has damaged the credibility of human rights at home". It accused the Strasbourg Court of mission creep and outlined a programme of fundamental change, advocating the repeal of the HRA and its replacement by a new Bill of Rights which would clarify rights, particularly those under Article 3 (Prohibition of Torture) and 8 (Right to a Family Life), to prevent their alleged abuse in respect of deportation, by changing the tests to be applied. There was a desire to confine the right to invoke a breach of the Convention to "cases that involve the criminal law and the liberty of the individual and other serious matters", with Parliament setting a threshold below which no Convention rights would be enforceable. It wanted to limit the reach of human rights cases to the territory of the UK, removing all activities of the armed forces overseas from it scope. It also advocated breaking the link between British courts and the Strasbourg Court so that no account need be taken of that court's rulings and further demanded a special status for the UK, where Strasbourg judgments would be merely advisory and threatened to leave the Convention entirely if this could not be achieved. This would

then leave us with a domestic Bill of Rights which would have the Convention text glossed to remove the areas of irritation identified and which would be interpreted solely by our own courts subject, as is the HRA itself, to Parliamentary supremacy in respect of primary legislation.

The paper was poorly drafted. It contained a series of assertions as to the effect of the ECHR which were misleading and erroneous, including claims, for example, that a judgment of the Strasbourg Court in the case of Dickson v UK had forced the UK to allow prisoners to go through artificial insemination with their partners to uphold their Article 8 rights when this was simply not correct. The paper was also short on detail as to what was proposed. A draft Bill was promised but this never happened. This may have been as a result of the paper's poor reception. It subsequently emerged that private opinion polling for the Party showed that a desire for a Bill of Rights and for repealing the HRA was not in the top ten priorities of the electorate and was only supported by 16% of those polled. The proposal was then relegated deep in the manifesto and after the 2015 Conservative victory the new Lord Chancellor, Michael Gove hinted that leaving the Convention was not desired and might not be necessary. A draft Bill was then promised for Autumn 2015, but did not materialise. The next news was that the matter had been transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Cabinet Office and it was hinted that the Bill of Rights was not only being looked at in the context of dealing with the HRA but also as a way to assert parliamentary sovereignty against decisions of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg and enable adverse judgments of that Court to be ignored, despite the "Direct effect" of such decisions. It was suggested this proposal might keep Boris Johnson in the Remain camp. When he supported Leave the whole thing disappeared.

On becoming PM, Theresa May stated that she would not seek to review our ECHR status for the duration of the Parliament and this was repeated in the Conservative manifesto of 2017. But it expressly left open that the matter might be revisited once Brexit was over. The present proposal of "updating of the HRA" put forward by our present Prime Minister in 2019 builds on this.

3. WHY OUR APPROACH IS WRONG

The reason, however, why the present and previous Conservative Governments find and have found it difficult to carry forward any project to change the HRA is that the desire for a measure to appease a small section of the public and the media and rid itself of an occasional irritation keeps on coming up against the reality of the benefits given to UK citizens by both the ECHR and its incorporation into our law by through the HRA.

If we left the Convention we would be spurning the reasons why we signed up in the first place. Notwithstanding pride in our sovereignty, it has been the intention and policy of successive UK governments over two centuries to seek to make the world a better and more predictable place by encouraging the creation of international agreements governing the behaviour of States. We have signed up to and ratified close on 14,000 since 1834, ranging in scale from the UN Charter to bilateral fishing agreements. Over 700 contain references to binding dispute resolution arrangements in the event of disagreements over interpretation, as does the Convention. Increasingly such treaties, such as the UN Convention on the Prohibition of Torture, deal with a state's conduct towards those subject to its power. As the Cabinet Office has conceded, whether or not it is in the Ministerial Code, it is the duty of Ministers to respect our international treaty obligations. The original decision to sign the Convention and keep adhering to it thereafter is because it was and is in our national self-interest to promote the Convention's values to our co-signatories and others. This is something the UK is recognised as doing rather well.

The impact of the Convention has been favourable for the development of the Rule of Law and principles of justice in our country. Over the years it has produced a number of landmark decisions which have challenged and halted practises which were once considered acceptable in Western democracies but which would now be considered unacceptable by the vast majority of the public. In Marckx v Belgium in 1979 it ended state discrimination against children on the grounds of illegitimacy. In Dudgeon v UK, the criminalisation of homosexual acts in private in Northern Ireland was held in breach of the Convention, a decision with a beneficial impact far more important elsewhere than in our own country. In Rantsev v Russia people trafficking was held to fall within the definition of slavery in Article 4 and a positive obligation placed on states to stop it.

One of the grounds advanced for our uncoupling ourselves from the Convention is the complaint that the Strasbourg Court has interpreted the Convention as a "living instrument" in a manner that undermines the intention of its signatories. Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument would mean that the Court remained fixed in the moral and ethical standards of 1950. On that basis none of the cases cited above would have ever occurred. There is nothing unusual in judicial interpretation based on current values. It is rooted in our Common Law tradition as Baroness Hale has pointed out "….it is in a comparatively rare case that an Act of Parliament has to be construed and applied exactly as it would have been applied when first passed. Statutes are said to be always speaking and so must be made to apply to situations which would never have been contemplated when they were first passed". Thus in 2001, a "member of the family", first used in 1920 could be applied to a same sex partner.

We could, whether or not we left the Convention, legislate to prevent any substitute Bill of Rights, unlike the HRA, being subject to such interpretation. But this would be an extreme form of Parliamentary micro management. It would also raise the risk, if we still adhered to the ECHR, of there being more instances where decisions of our own courts conflicted with those of the Strasbourg Court. One suggestion that has been made in the past by the Cameron government is that the read down provisions of Section 3 of the HRA should be removed. But such a move would simply lead to more declarations of incompatibility, creating uncertainty and the need for remedial orders to be passed, unless it were just the cue for a Government to ignore such judgments.

That suggestion also fails to take into account the value of the cross fertilisation between our courts and the Strasbourg Court. Strasbourg jurisprudence has been influenced by our own. We have recent examples. In Al Khawaja v UK in 2009, the Court moved from a condemnation by a chamber of the Court of our rules on hearsay, to the acceptance of the decision of our Supreme Court, when the Grand Chamber revisited the case, following the rejection of its previous judgment by the Supreme Court. In the case of Horncastle, the Supreme Court considering that the Strasbourg Court had simply not understood how our hearsay evidence rules worked. We have also been the beneficiaries of the Strasbourg ruling in S and Marper in 2009, that the blanket retention of DNA, practised in England and Wales (the only jurisdiction in Europe to do this) was in breach of the right to a private life. Our own House of Lords had earlier held this policy compatible with Convention rights, but Conservatives were at the time very concerned at the infringement of civil liberties involved in such retention. There was therefore no complaint about the Strasbourg Court decision which led to a change in the law.

This isn't to say that all is perfect. Senior members and retired members of our judiciary have expressed concern that the Court has been failing at times to respect national differences of interpretation and has been failing to appreciate the practical limits to its authority in giving judgements which contradict settled and democratically approved majority decisions. This was a notable theme of Lord Sumption's Reith Lectures.

The confrontation that developed between the Strasbourg Court and Parliament over the case of Hirst on prisoner voting is certainly a good illustration. In itself it was largely symbolic and of little practical consequence. But symbols can matter in a parliamentary democracy and it can be argued it was an unnecessary interference with a rational policy supported by Parliament and public. But Hirst was eleven years ago. In 2017 the matter was resolved by David Lidington, as Lord Chancellor, by the most minor amendment to the voter registration rules to allow prisoners on release on Temporary Licence to vote.

Furthermore there has since been a considerable change of approach by the Strasbourg Court. The Brighton Declaration of 2012, negotiated by Ken Clarke when Justice Secretary with my assistance, has helped the efficiency of the Court and reduced its backlog of cases. It has also started a constructive dialogue between national courts and the Strasbourg Court. In the Animal Defenders case which concerned our ban on political advertising on broadcast media, the Court deferred to the rationale of both our legislature and our courts and found the ban acceptable. At present nearly all cases brought against the UK in Strasbourg are struck out as inadmissible. The statistics show that during 2019 there were only 3 judgments against the UK on new matters and only 8 new cases as opposed to repeat matters were pending. The only outstanding matter that remains unresolved from a previous judgment of the Strasbourg Court concerns the UKs difficulties in carrying out investigations into deaths arising from the Troubles during operations of the Security Forces. It is also noteworthy that Lord Sumption, despite his critique of the workings of the Court expressed no desire to see the UK leave the Convention. His call was for the Court to be more restrained in its approach, which on the evidence is what has been happening.

Constitutionally, leaving the Convention, or placing ourselves in deliberate incompatibility with it, calls into question the Devolution settlements to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which are underpinned by Convention rights accessible through the HRA, which the devolved administrations must observe. The Westminster Parliament can of course legislate to change all that, but this would be against the wishes of all devolved governments and they will argue that the UK Government will be breaching the Sewel Convention and latest devolution statutes if it does so. In the case of Northern Ireland it would certainly breach the terms

of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement which is an international treaty with the Irish Government. To get round this it was being suggested in 2015 that the Bill of Rights should contain the text of the Convention, which would meet the Belfast/Good Friday requirement, but then have the controversial Articles such as 3 and 8 glossed by means of sub clauses so that they might be interpreted thereafter in the way the Government wanted. A moment's thought must cast doubt on the feasibility and effectiveness of such an approach.

Continued adherence to the ECHR and its incorporation into domestic law is also going to be important in the context of any future relationship with the EU in the fields of Justice and Security. The EU has made clear at an early stage of the negotiations that future participation in these by the UK should be possible in these areas, provided we are adherent to the Convention. But the UK seems to have rejected this approach as too constricting, which has been taken as a sign that the Government is determined to change our relationship to the Convention. If so it will come at the cost of any ability to be a participant in Europol or other forms of security arrangements. Data sharing will also be impossible, although this has the added problem of the EU wishing to retain the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg as the court with final jurisdiction in matters concerning data.

4. THE WIDER IMPACT OF WITHDRAWAL

One of the problems with the Government's general approach to the ECHR, is that in promoting change it underestimates the positive impact that the Convention has had on improving the Rule of law in places where it has previously never existed and also appears oblivious of the destructive impact which our non-adherence will have on its wider effectiveness.

We can see this by looking at countries with difficult human rights records. Turkey, for example has generated between 1959 and 2011 over 2400 adverse judgments. In 2019 alone there were 212 applications against Turkey which were declared admissible and 113 judgments, of which 97 found at least one violation of the Convention. It has been responsible for approaching half of all cases concerning freedom of expression. The judgments cover cases ranging from the action of the security forces against the PKK, demands for wearing headscarves at universities, the right to criticise prison conditions and the banning of political parties. In all these cases the Strasbourg court has in the words a of a leading Turkish legal academic, Basak Cali, provided a "responded and authoritative statement about the boundaries between rights and spaces in Turkish domestic political discourse". Despite the challenges we can also see the same thing happen in other countries with difficult records, such as Russia, where the Convention is routinely invoked to challenge rights violations by public authorities, including beatings up and torture by the police and similarly in Romania and the Ukraine. Even countries with better records have benefitted. There has been no criticism in the UK of the Strasbourg Court for its decisions in Vallianatos v Greece in 2014 and Oliari v Italy in 2015, where both governments were held in breach of Articles 8 (Family life) and 14 (no discrimination in the enjoyment of rights) in not including same sex couples in their new laws on civil unions.

The counter argument to these examples is that many of the judgments are unimplemented and that we are therefore part of an international treaty that binds us, but has little impact on those who choose to break the rules. The backlog on implementation, which is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers does indeed stand presently at around 10,000 of which around 45% are over five years old and some countries with long histories of rights violations are principal offenders. But despite long delays, compliance is usually in the end achieved, but this is entirely due to peer group pressure through the Council of Europe. Our threats to withdraw from or ignore the Convention are not helpful in

this respect and this has an impact beyond member states of the Convention to human rights obligations. Russia has invoked our ambivalent attitude to the ECHR to justify non implementation. So did the President of Kenya in obstructing the work of the International Criminal Court in Kenya there. In contrast our willingness to follow the ECHR judgements scrupulously in the case of the deportation of Abu Qatada to Jordan, helped ensure important reforms to the Jordanian criminal justice system in respect of the risk of evidence obtained under torture being used in their criminal courts, which were both needed and welcomed. Yet the response here from ministers to what had been achieved was negative -a classic case of seeing the glass half empty when it was in fact almost full.

5. RECENT ISSUES

Since the arrival of the new Conservative administration under Boris Johnson, the first and to date only concrete example of a desire to change our relationship with the ECHR has come in respect of seeking to protect service personnel and veterans from prosecution, for actions taken when on active deployment abroad. Change is also being sought for the State's liability for such unlawful acts.

The Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill was published in early 2020. Its key proposal is to prevent the prosecution of service personnel and veterans for alleged offences committed on overseas operations, after a lapse of five years, save in exceptional circumstances. There is then a set of elaborate hurdles that a prosecutor must overcome to establish such circumstances. Rather oddly, there is a list of exclusions that covers all forms of sexual offences. This could result in an allegation of torture or murder going un-prosecuted whereas an allegation of rape arising out of the same circumstances would be. No explanation is provided for this distinction, which may be related to the Government being embarrassed at including sexual offences during armed conflict in its proposals, when it has taken the international lead for their prevention and punishment. Finally, any prosecution outside the five year limit will require the consent of the Attorney General. In relation to civil litigation, the Bill proposes to introduce a six year absolute time bar for bringing claims -the normal limit is three years for personal injury and one year for a claim under the HRA, but these limits can be extended where justice requires it. A similar change will prevent claims successfully brought abroad from being enforced here outside the new limits.

If the Bill becomes a statute, we will have effectively created a two tier justice system. A soldier serving in a foreign army will not enjoy time limit protection for allegations of similar crimes committed abroad, even though they may well be triable here. Service personnel, Veterans and the State, which will often bear joint liability with individuals, will enjoy special privileges in any civil claims not enjoyed by others, undermining the principle of equality under the law. It is hard to see how this is compatible with Article 14 of the ECHR which requires no discrimination in respect of the enjoyment of Convention rights such as the Right to a Fair Trial under Article 6 or indeed how it is compatible with Common Law principles.

The Government also speaks of a willingness to derogate from the ECHR for overseas operations. This is certainly permissible, but it is hard to see how it will

help. Derogation cannot cover non derogable Articles of the Convention. This covers Article 2 (Right to Life except for death from lawful acts of war), 3 (torture), 7 (no punishment without Law) and Protocol 13 on the abolition of the Death Penalty. As a result the only area in which it might assist, is in respect of the detention of those fighting against UK forces. But even this may well not be necessary in many cases. The decision of the Strasbourg Court in Hassan v UK in 2014 has established that Convention rights can be looked at alongside the Geneva Conventions and that battlefield detention is permissible to protect ones own forces and the prisoner himself. In Serdar Mohammed v Sec of State for Defence [2017]UKSC 2 this enabled the Supreme Court to hold that the detention of combatants for longer than 96 hours provided for in the ISAF regulations and Afghan law, could be justified if this was needed for imperative reasons of security, even if the Court also held that the review mechanisms in force did not comply with the requirements of Article 5(4) ECHR. It based this on the implied authority under the UNSC resolutions that "all necessary means" includes detention.

While it cannot be certain that the Strasbourg Court will agree with the Supreme Court, the judgment supports the view that some of the issues the Government wished to address are open to easier and less controversial solutions than derogation. What really remains the outstanding issue of controversy is the requirement to carry out investigations into deaths at the hands of the armed forces, in circumstances where the ECHR applies, as the UK is "exercising control". The UK was so held to do in Southern Iraq and civil litigation has flowed from it. But this may not work as intended either. It is far from clear that derogation for an overseas deployment for peacekeeping in a foreign country, involving the exercise of control over an area by military forces would necessarily meet the threshold of "an emergency threatening the life of the nation", which alone justifies derogation.

6. CONCLUSION

All this highlights the lack of clear thinking about the ECHR and the HRA by the Government generally. Rather than seek to work within the framework of an international treaty that has done much good and try to influence its future development constructively, it keeps on seeking ways of wriggling round it that damage our credibility for little or no benefit. Obviously if we pull out of the Convention, then it would be open to us to have a Bill of Rights which could give us rights substantially different and probably inferior to those that we currently enjoy from the Convention. But it will come at cost to our international standing, at a time when it is already affected by our leaving the EU. If alternatively we are intent on fiddling with the HRA to try to reduce the impact of Strasbourg Court jurisprudence, whilst maintaining our adherence to the Convention, the likely outcome is going to be minimal. We are already addressing some issues which may trouble sections of the public with no change to the HRA at all. Trying to go further will not work. The benefits are illusory and this is why this project never gets anywhere. We would do far better by celebrating the undoubted contribution our country has made to and our achievement in developing human rights as a global concept than in constantly suggesting we should now undermine it.

It is important for the United Kingdom's international standing that Conservatives support and promote the valuable role of the Council of Europe and the ECHR and help explain the contribution which the U.K. has made to both as well as the benefits that flow from our membership and active participation in them.

7. FURTHER READING

Council of Europe
https://www.coe.int

European Convention on Human Rights
https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf
https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-convention

Human Rights Act 1998
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents

Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill 2019 - 21
https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/overseasoperationsservicepersonnelandveterans.html

The Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC is a former Chair of the Conservative Group for Europe. He was the Member of Parliament for Beaconsfield between 1997 - 2019 and previously served as Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee from 2015 - 2019 and Attorney General from 2010 - 2014.

Conservative Group for Europe

Founded almost 50 years ago, the Conservative Group for Europe is an organisation committed to a positive and constructive approach to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

The Group believes that it is in the interests of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the wider world that the UK maintains the closest, practicable political, economic, social and security relationship with its friends, partners and allies in the European Union.

Our activities include hosting discussions and debates on topical European issues, publishing policy research, fostering close co-operation with centre-right parties within the EU, as well as sharing articles and speeches, and promoting a pro-European stance within the Conservative Party.

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