

Churchill – a ‘founding father’ of the European Union – would vote to Remain

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Winston Churchill has often been voted the most important/influential Briton ever. I was surprised to read claims that Churchill was a Eurosceptic, so I read through all his four great “European” speeches from 1946 to 1949. They were carefully prepared as a historic record of his views, delivered at grand events amidst great ceremony and designed to achieve impact: they certainly did.

Read Felix Klos’s short book “Churchill on Europe” with its brilliant account of the build-up, and response afterwards, to the 1946 Zurich speech. Klos then chronicles how the reaction inspired Churchill onwards to the founding of what is now the European Movement ([link](#)) at his Albert Hall speech – given beneath the banner “Europe arise”.

Having read the speeches and considered the way the world was changing around him, I have no doubt that Churchill would have voted to Remain in the European Union (EU) – but of course no-one can ever know now. However, he was one of the EU’s ‘founding fathers’ and its values represent the fulfilment of his life’s work. Moreover, he approved of our 1961 application to join a Community where the first sentence of its founding Treaty made clear that its over-arching political aim - “ever-closer union amongst the peoples of Europe” - went far wider than merely a “Common Market”.

In the darkest days of 1940, Churchill had proposed a complete union between Great Britain and his beloved France. After the terrible consequences of what he called the Thirty Years War (1914-45), what should Britain and France do to tackle the “German Problem”? His answer was clear – initially, he wanted France to take the lead in helping Germany to re-join the European family.

During the period spanned by these speeches, the Soviet Union – the direct predecessor state of Putin’s Russia – had just acquired the atomic bomb, and occupied by force the eastern part of Europe – eerily echoed by Putin’s current machinations.

As he watched the Empire unravel – epitomised by Indian independence in 1947 – his views evolved as events unfolded around him. How else would a statesman of his experience react to a new situation? He had experienced the vicissitudes of the highest offices in the land for a total of more than a third of a century – in contrast to the handful of years of our current/recent leadership.

The breadth of his vision was laid out at The Hague in 1948: “*Mutual aid in the economic field and joint military defence must inevitably be accompanied step by step with a parallel policy of closer political unity.*” In the last of these speeches, he made his views on the UK’s role crystal clear: “*Britain is an integral part of Europe, and we mean to play our part in the revival of her prosperity and greatness.*”

Already in 1947, he had founded the European Movement, tasking it “*To create this body of public interest and public support is one of the main tasks of the European Movement... It must now build up a vast body of popular support...*” In the centre of the task was the Charter of Human Rights – agreed in 1951.

His founding values of the importance of law and justice for citizens – in a peaceful world – were recognised in the award of the [2012 Nobel Peace Prize](#) to the European Union: "*for over six decades [having] contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe*". Churchill wanted "Europe" to be a project of the people, not a project only of the 'governments' – inherently the "elite".

Some have taken a few comments scattered across the decades of his work and tried to argue that Churchill would have been a Eurosceptic. Reading these set-piece speeches – dramatic and graphic as they are – quickly gave the lie to such suggestions. Former Prime Minister Edward Heath delivered the most powerful rebuttal in 1996 "*I knew Winston Churchill, I worked with him, I stayed with him at his home at Chartwell and I have read his speeches many times. I can assure you that Winston Churchill was no Euro-sceptic.*"

Anyone who feels that the clearly-stated views of the most influential-ever Briton are worth considering should read his speeches and consider the changing circumstances in which they were delivered. **I did – and now have no doubt that Churchill would have urged us to stretch every sinew to make sure the British public have their voice heard on the outcome of Brexit talks through a democratic People's Vote to remain in the EU.**

LINKS:

Twenty-page analysis by Graham Bishop [Link](#): A timeline of world events - influencing Churchill day-by-day and forcing an evolution in his thinking as events unfolded. Felix Klos' book gives you the personal events – letters, lunches, meetings – that made the "speeches" happen.

Speeches: [1946 Zurich text \(audio\)](#); [1947 Albert Hall](#); [1948 The Hague text \(Pathé news clip\)](#) ([70th anniversary celebrations](#)); [1949 Kingsway Hall](#)

Rebuttals: [Edward Heath rebuttal](#); [rebutting a fabricated quotation](#)

Further reading: *Churchill on Europe* by Felix Klos, 86 pages [Amazon](#)