

## Politics for a Divided Nation

The politics of nationhood have reshaped the politics of Europe. In the first of three posts, I outline why the politics of nationhood have become more important, and why it is fuelled the rise of national populism. The next post will suggest six principles to put national cohesion at the centre of nation state governance. The final post will apply those arguments to the divided nation of England.

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### Part I: Nationhood and Belonging

#### Nationhood and belonging

I'm delighted and honoured to be here tonight.

It was around 20 years ago, at a time when I had ministerial responsibility for cohesion, that I first met Ed Kessler here and learned about the work of the Woolf Institute. It is a sad reflection on our national lack of progress since that I find myself talking about cohesion again tonight.

I will talk about nationhood and belonging. I'll argue that a cohesive and inclusive society – one in which we all feel we belong – depends on a shared sense of nationhood.

England's identities are contested. You know that from the lamp posts and roundabouts. But to understand what is happening here, we need to understand what is happening in the rest of Europe.

#### The politics of nationhood

The politics of Europe have been upended by 'the politics of nationhood'.

It is manifested in the rise of national populist parties: our own Reform UK, National Rally in France, the Brothers of Italy, Germany's AfD, and the rest.

National populists are in power or share power in at least six European nations, have been in power in two others, and are on the verge of power in others. Only a foolish optimist thinks the Fidesz defeat in Hungary marks a turning of the tide.

The politics of nationhood revolve around questions about the nation.

Who belongs to the nation, and on what terms? What obligations do we owe to each other and what rights do we enjoy? Who tells the national history? Should law and state policy in sovereign nations be made nationally or internationally? Should democracy only reflect the majority or also protect minorities? How are borders, migration, and asylum to be managed?

National populism offers clear if uncomfortable and narrow answers to those questions.

Tonight I will argue that those who would oppose national populism are failing because they have failed to tell an alternative and positive story of the nation.

Many voters worry more about their nation today than they might have done in past decades. Nation state governments appear increasingly unable to protect the interests of their people in a rapidly changing world. The gap between politicians promises and delivery is widening. A pervasive lack of trust permeates politics and its institutions.

There are good reasons for those concerns.

#### *Diminished economic sovereignty*

The economic sovereignty of nation states was diminished as the globalisation of international companies, supply chains and finance markets took them beyond the reach of the national government. What is more, international institutions including the WTO and the EU were designed to reduce nation state intervention in economies and facilitate free markets. National governments did the same in the belief that a rising tide of growth would lift all ships.

The UK went far further than most in dismantling national economic sovereignty; deregulating capital markets, disdaining questions of national ownership and welcoming extractive investments by hedge funds. But most of Europe followed a similar course.

By the time it was clear that the wealth did not trickle down, and that taxing international capital effectively to sustain welfare states was hard, we were in the global banking crisis. The transfer of economic sovereignty to markets and international institutions left nation states struggling to respond. Much of Europe still struggles with the lingering impact in former industrial and peripheral rural areas; an impact that has only been intensified by technological innovation, trade competition and the pandemic.

While many on the left assumed this classic crisis of international capitalism would move voters to the left and foster demands for radical international responses, the opposite happened.

#### *A rise in sovereigntism*

In nation after nation, voters became more conservative in electing parties promising national austerity. And they increasingly looked to the nation state to tackle their problems. Far from becoming more internationalist they became more sovereigntist.

Sovereignists see the nation state as the primary focus for economic, political and social decisions. They want the nation state, not remote international institutions to be the protector and arbiter of the nation's interests. Those feelings intensified in those parts of Europe who also felt disappointed with the failures of the EU.

Sovereignism sees legitimate authority resting with the people and their national institutions. It is usually Eurosceptic, in the sense of wanting to limit the powers of EU institutions (if not actually following the UK's Brexit) but sovereignists are not just hostile towards Brussels but embrace a wider rejection of supranational structures which are perceived to erode the independence and effectiveness of national government. These include international legal treaties, international trade conventions, and transnational companies.

### *The impact of migration*

The combined pressures of globalisation and economic crisis was felt at the same time as Europe's nations were also being changed by the cumulative impact of migration. Whether for employment, family reunion or refuge from conflict, oppression and poverty, nations were beginning to look and sound different.

There was often a strong economic need for new migration. The pressure from international refugee movements were intense. Here too nation states struggled to respond. On crucial issues, nation state sovereignty had been weakened and international collaboration failed. Created for sound idealistic reasons, the European Union, EU freedom of movement, the drafting of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Refugee Convention had all moved key decisions away from nation state governments to the dismay of sovereignist opinion.

Growing diversity created social challenges that nations have not managed well. For many, migration has been positive. Significant parts of national populations – often younger, higher educated and relatively prosperous – were comfortable with diversity and valued the enrichment of national life. Many migrants found and made their place in nations, helping to ease the way for newer arrivals.

But significant fractions of the majority were uncomfortable with so much change, and some were overtly hostile. Some migrants lived quite separate lives – geographically, culturally, economically or educationally – from wider society.

The myriad fracture lines created by this interaction of economic, social and cultural change were reflected in political and social turbulence. These had roots in competition for good employment, entitlement to welfare states, and access to health, housing and other public services. White working-class voters might perceive a loss of political voice while other communities felt they were denied one by prejudice and racism.

Crime, policing, and terrorism were potent flashpoints for distrust. Cultural differences were manifest around education, parental rights, faith and dress codes. There were

arguments around national identity, citizenship and the responsibilities and right of citizens. The welcome extended to asylum seekers became particularly contentious.

### *Ideas of the nation challenged*

Those of us who are comfortable with change often do not appreciate how fundamentally ideas of nations and nation states that were widely shared just a few decades ago have now been challenged.

Two hundred years ago, most of today's European states either did not exist or had different borders. Nation states that emerged from older empires were shaped by linguistic, cultural or ethnic identities. The idea of the sovereign nation codified in the Montevideo Convention in 1933 took as its basis a 'permanent population' that was 'settled' and 'stable'. The sovereign nation state became the building block of the UN Charter. In the west, at least, the sovereign nation state was taken to be liberal and democratic.

80 years after the formation of the United Nations, European nations have lost sovereignty over their economies and the ability to reshape society. (We are proud of the NHS and the welfare state that we created within a sovereign nation. It would be much harder to do the same today.)

The ability of governments and parliaments to defend their voters' interests has been reduced. National legal systems have ceded authority to international law. Populations can no longer be assumed to be permanent, settled or stable.

### *The nation appeal of national populism*

Voters' ideas of the nation state are being challenged. In response, national populism frames a nation state response to voters' grievances.

We are all familiar with the tropes:

'Establishment parties have failed the people' 'No one listens to the ordinary people' 'Nation state governments should serve the interests of the people by putting our own people first'. 'Power has been given away to the EU bureaucrats'. 'Democracy should implement the will of the majority'. 'Welfare states should look after our own.' 'The courts, the universities, the public service broadcasters, and liberal elites undermine the nation and protect the interests of the undeserving.' 'Migration must be ended or even reversed and asylum denied'.

National populism is an international phenomenon, but it is expressed everywhere in the politics of individual nations. It tailors its appeal to the cultural, historical, and political conditions in each. In some nations, national populism is economically radical and critical – at least rhetorically – of big business. Some national cultures allow more explicit racism than others. Appeals to Christianity vary in their appeal.

While national populism rests on a core of ethno-nationalism and racism, its promise to put the nation state back as the defender of the national interest resonates much more widely.

Most voters think their national government should be sovereign, that their parliament should pass their laws, and that nation courts should uphold them. Most voters think there must be boundaries on the generosity of welfare system, that borders should be well managed, and that belonging to the nation involves more than citizenship and a passport.

This appeal to ideas of the nation enables national populism to mobilise a disparate electoral coalition beyond its hard core: the patriotic, the socially conservative, those disillusioned with politics, the less well educated who are economically and socially marginalised, those in 'left behind' places, and those who dislike the pace of social and economic change.

### *The sweeping impact of national populism*

National populism's impact is felt far beyond its own voters. By cannibalising the electoral base of established parties, destabilising mainstream governments, and setting the political agenda, it has reshaped the politics of nation after nation. It has weakened, destroyed or transformed parties of the centre right and centre left.

Only ten years ago the UK's Conservative and Labour Parties both supported EU membership. Today, the Conservatives are solidly anti-EU and Labour still resists seeking membership again. But it's not only in Brexit Britain where once dominant centre right and social democratic parties have disappeared or lost much of their support. Democratic politics is being reduced to the question of which party or coalition can defeat national populism or exclude it from power. In the process, the range of democratic choices is reduced. Fidesz in Hungary was defeated by a former Fidesz minister who supports many of its policies, not by a liberal or a democratic socialist.

National populism is a route to power that constantly identifies new enemies of the people and destabilises the status quo. As a disruptive force it does not need viable nation state solutions. Its long-term impact is unpredictable. It has led both to the autocratic corruption of Orban and the Meloni who works to co-opt the EU to her national populist and conservative agenda .

National populism's ability to disrupt attracts individuals, corporations and foreign states who will gain if Europe's nation states are weak. These include tech companies who fear regulation, hedge funds seeking speculative profit, the fossil fuel lobby, those want a divided Europe, those who would undermine solidarity with Ukraine, and, obviously, those who simply see the opportunity to enrich themselves whether by cryptocurrency or social media clicks.

Backed by immense funding and amplified by social media, national populism creates an ideological money laundering system through which malign ideas like white supremacy, Christian nationalism, antisemitism, islamophobia and opposition to climate change action can all be expressed as a defence of the national interest. We should take the US government seriously when its latest National Security Strategy promises to support 'patriotic parties' to prevent the 'civilisational erasure' of Europe.

## Part II: Governing for National Cohesion

Mainstream politics has failed to create cohesive diverse nations and so enabled the rise of national populism. This post - the second in of three - outlines the flawed strategies pursued by Europe's nation states. It argues that national cohesion should be at the heart of nation state governance and outlines six principle for nation building.

### *The failures of mainstream politics*

National populism is influential because mainstream politics has failed to articulate more attractive and more inclusive views of the nation. Old ideas of nationhood have been challenged. They cannot simply be summoned back into life. We need to find new ones for the 21st century.

But rather than contest populist ideas of the nation, many choose to say little about nation at all. The response to profound economic and social change and the rise of sovereigntist sentiment has been complacent, weak, unimaginative, complacent and, ultimately, ineffective.

### *Defending the status quo*

Too often mainstream politics has defended a status quo – globalisation, liberal democracy, pluralism, the protection of minorities, the rule of law, the ECHR, the European Union, as self-evidently virtuous. The 'centre-ground' does not acknowledge how many people don't think the status quo is working for them. Rather than engaging with those citizens' concerns they are often dismissed.

### *Intercultural integration*

State strategies to promote intercultural integration by building connections between communities at local level have been of limited impact in the absence of effective strategies to foster cohesive nationhood. Too often, 'integration' has been seen as the responsibility of minorities rather than of the whole community.

### *Civic nationalism*

Liberal ideas of civic nationalism in which we are bound together by citizenship, and the law has proved too thin to hold us together. Voters support civic ideals like democracy, the rule of law, paying your taxes, the protection of minorities, and welfare state, but this support is often qualified by questions about who belongs to the nation and the rights which come with it. Migrants may become citizens but find they are still not accepted as part of the nation.

### *Established narratives*

Attempts have been made to promote established national narratives – Laicite in France, Britishness here, Kulturkampf in Germany – as the core of national identity. Not only are these contested by liberal and conservative perspectives, but it has also proved difficult to expand them to include communities with a different experience of the same history or

their own ideas on the place of faith in society. Competing narratives have often become the boundaries of culture wars.

### **Multiculturalism**

Aspirations to multicultural societies based on the recognition of group identities and rights were often half-hearted and easily abandoned. Respect for difference often neglected the work need to identify what was valued in common. Too often parts of the majority – particularly the white working class – felt recognition was being offered to others from minorities but not to them. A certain ‘lived multiculturalism’ exists in many diverse cities but does not bind the nation together.

### **Faith**

The place of faith has not been settled. Public expressions of faith may be challenged. Liberal, secular education has clashed with demands for faith sensitive teaching. Muslim communities bore much populist criticism, but antisemitism is now resurgent. Strands of national populism champion right wing Christian nationalism. At the same time, much grass-roots work by diverse faith communities that supports cohesion and local belonging is unreported and unknown.

European nations have not yet made a success of their diverse societies. Faced with a rise in national populism, most states have swung away from liberal tolerance of difference and the recognition of minority group rights. In their place have come more demanding expectations to accept established national stories and values. While some place the focus on new migrants, many directly or implicitly targeted established communities of migrant heritage.

National cohesion is increasingly portrayed as a problem that stems from the presence of or threat from minorities, and not as a challenge that the whole of society should take on. In the process, state policies validate the national populist view of the nation.

### **The importance of cohesion**

Some will deny the link I make between nation and cohesion.

They argue that it is economic failure that drives fragmentation. Economies that don't deliver foster resentment and anger towards the different, the migrant, and the welfare recipient. Tackle those economic failures, the ‘deliverist’ argument goes and worries about difference will, if not disappear, at least seem less important.

In principle that might be true.

But a cohesive nation is not the product of resolving material grievances but the essential precondition for tackling them.

It will only be possible to improve employment, tackle deprivation, solve housing shortages, run good public services and sustain welfare states when people believe they belong to a cohesive nation built on shared values. A nation in which people feel ‘we are in it together’.

Voters need to believe nations are built on fair contribution and secure rights; that reciprocity underpins public policy and private behaviour. In those nations taxation is seen as a collective pooling of resources, not a private contract with the state. Citizens obey the law because to do so serves the common good, not because of fear of being caught. Such nations will share a national story of how each came to be here of the values all share. In cohesive nations, people will be confident that the nation's resource serve the common good.

Nor is every sense of alienation rooted in material grievance. When we look for the thread that connects the Southport riots, the flags, attacks on Jewish people and the rise of Islamophobia we should recognise these as unresolved issues of identity, belonging and clashing world views.

Cohesion cannot be built at local level alone. A local sense of belonging and cohesion is important, but people mostly trust their neighbours in their own community. They are less likely to trust those they do not know and will never know. These are the people who comprise the 'imagined community' which Benedict Anderson said underpins ideas of the nation. It is our ability to identify with each other at that level that will underpin a cohesive nation.

There will be no real economic progress or social cohesion without a stronger, more inclusive and more progressive idea of the nation. Nor will it be possible to challenge national populism.

### **Governing for national cohesion: a new paradigm**

We need a radical new approach.

Building cohesive nations is often seen as just one of many government activities. It is frequently neglected or given low priority unless there is a crisis: a social disturbance, a high-profile crime, or a terrorist attack.

I will argue that building a cohesive nation should become a central organising principle of the nation state. This defining mission should run through economic, social, cultural and foreign policy.

The process of cohesive nation building needs to become a whole of society enterprise. It will require the leadership of governments and the active participation of all parts of civic society. A vision of cohesive nationhood must be led and facilitated by national government, political parties and national institutions. But much of the process of nation building must take place at local level, in communities, municipalities, and places of work, and will need the leadership of civic society organisations, faith groups, sports, arts and cultural organisations.

The aim would be to create a shared understanding of the nation that represent the largest possible common ground across its people. Political leadership will be essential, but the process should belong neither to left nor right, nor to an individual party. The task is to

fashion a constructive and inclusive idea of the nation within which democratic politics is conducted. National populism's hard core xenophobic supporters would put themselves outside this nation, but it would offer an alternative to those many who want to see a patriotic and effective nation state.

This is an ambitious project for challenging times. I won't pretend I have answered all the many questions it raises. But in a time of crisis, we need a new paradigm for Europe's nation states; a new way of thinking about our nations that in time can become as deeply embedded and influential as globalisation, neo-liberalism, supra-national Europeanism and the social democratic 'Third Way' have been in the past.

### Six principles for nation building

At the heart of the paradigm is a continuous process of nation building.

For this lecture – and to stimulate discussion – I'll set out six principles for cohesive nation building. They are intended to illustrate how nation states might outline their vision of a cohesive nation.

- A sovereign nation at the core of national policy and international collaboration

No nation stands alone in this challenging world but extending economic and democratic sovereignty is the necessary building block of international cooperation. Nation building will seek the best balance between national sovereignty and international collaboration.

- Shared nationhood as the precondition for tackling national challenges.

Government cannot tackle the nation's challenges without a powerful sense of proud, shared and inclusive nationhood. This will require an active and continuous process of nation building.

- Nation building as a shared responsibility

Nationhood must reflect all the people, communities and cultures who make up the nation. Both the right and responsibility to take part in nation building fall on all.

- Building a nation with shared histories

Nation building must encourage a respectful dialogue between with different understandings of national history . Everyone should hear their own story in a shared national story that tells how we all came to share the nation and what we might hope to build together.

- Building a nation with shared values

Nation building will enable the national community to identify the values they share and the nation they wish to create together. Nation building will navigate the tensions between conflicting values, including those of faith and secularism.

- Ensuring the nation's resources serve the common good

Nationhood would be based on the promotion of the common good and should be the test against which different economic and social strategies are assessed. Immigration rates should not exceed the pace at which national cohesion can be sustained.

### **Public policy in a cohesive nation**

A proactive process of nation building will help foster understanding and shared nationhood between people of different communities, places and classes. Nation states should be clear that public policy reflects the shared values and identities of the nation

Policy for migration, asylum, borders, should enhance cohesion and not divide the nation. The design of welfare systems and access to public services should be rooted in shared values that fairly reflect contribution and entitlement. Education should reflect a balance between secular and faith values.

The rights and obligations of citizenship should promote a shared sense of nationhood. Cohesive nations will acknowledge the inherent tensions between national and international laws and judicial systems. They will seek the best balance between them as an integral and legitimate part of democratic debate.

Cohesive nations will commit to ensuring that all citizens enjoy a voice and a stake in the future of the nation. There can be no shared sense of nationhood if many are excluded socially, politically marginalised or poor. Economic policy will aim to rebuild national economic sovereignty and see strong nation states as the basis for international cooperations.

Cohesive nations will acknowledge the inherent tensions between national and international laws and judicial systems and seek the best balance between them.

### **A new basis for nation building**

These principles are intended to foster a basis on which we can feel we all belong to the same nation. In contrast to the approach of most nation states, they recognise that the future is diverse and that sensitivity is needed in finding shared national stories. Nationhood is not just about identity and citizenship but about the design of welfare states and economic policy. States should acknowledge the role of faith but extend inclusion to voters marginalised by class. They will acknowledge the importance of controlling migration but are honest about the challenges nations face and the tensions between national and international law.

Governments can and should set out the vision, but the hard work of finding shared national stories will have to be done by civil society. Matching shared values to the design of the welfare state will take time and care. Identifying how economic sovereignty can be rebuilt, and how strong nation states can collaborate in new ways will not be simple.

But once we have a vision, we have something to work towards.

## Faith communities and nation building

This must be a whole of society enterprise, so let me talk briefly about the role of faith.

At the most basic level, people of faith must be part of the process of nation building simply because they are part of the nation. There is no shared national story that does not include the story – or stories – of people of faith and of faith communities.

But faith communities can also bring valuable and much needed skills to this enterprise. Faith is no stranger to sectarianism and bigotry, but at their best faith traditions are confident in the discussion of values. Faith traditions understand the importance of narratives in explaining who we are today. Faith traditions have long experience of enabling people to live with difference.

These skills are not in abundant supply in wider society. Faith communities have much to contribute to the process of nation building.

Over ten years ago the report of the Woolf Institutes Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life received much public discussion. But imagine much greater its impact would have been if government of the day had explicitly set out to explore and defend the role of faith in a cohesive nation.

It is because faith is important that the Centre for English Identity and Politics has invited writers from many faiths to explore how faiths should respond to these pressing issues of identity and nation. The lead editors of the Faith and England's National Identities project, Jonathan Chaplin and Andrew Bradstock are in the audience tonight. In one influential piece, my friend and colleague Francis Davis has tracked the finances and the personnel that underpin the British Christian Right with which Tommy Robinson is now aligned.

## Part III: England

### The England question

England is as fractured as any other European nation. England needs a process of nation-building as much as any other nation. The process will need to start from the history that shaped an England as a nation of complex identities without institutional forms of expression.

Under Empire, Englishness and Britishness became intertwined. For the English at least, Britain and the Empire could be imagined as an extension of England, English institutions and English interests. The Westminster Parliament was called the Imperial Parliament long into the 20th century. When Walter Bagehot wrote about the governance of Britain and Ireland, he called his book *A Guide to the English Constitution*. This was the Anglo-centric view of the British Union.

The England of those times might find expression in culture. Radical England might invoke resistance going back to the 'Norman yoke'. 'Little Englanders' might condemn the deaths of working class youth in imperial wars. But most of the time, England needed no distinct

political expression of its own. 'Britishness' could reflect a common interest in the enterprise of Empire, albeit one in which in which Scotland and Wales had a distinct presence. (That compromise did not work well in Ireland, leaving a harsh legacy across the British Isles.)

Post the second world war, Empire declined and with it the imperial glue that had sustained Britain as a unitary state. Growing national aspirations from the 1960s ultimately saw the establishment of parliaments and national governments for Wales and Scotland. It took the deaths of thousands of people before a fragile agreement to establish the Northern Ireland Assembly could be reached.

The establishment politics, governance and the media in London is so Anglo-centric that the extraordinary impact of this politics of nationhood on the modern history of the United Kingdom is barely recognised. England's civil servants, NGOs, media and politicians are more likely to emphasise a British rather than an English identity. Yet, where once politics across the island of Britain was contested by, crudely, a British business class party and a British working-class party, the politics of nations increasingly diverged. Each nation was contested and won by different parties. Even when, as today, every part of the UK outside England has a nationalist leader, few stop to ponder why. Yet in the recent elections, the parties contesting them, and the choices of voters reflected different ideas of nationhood and of the politics of nationhood.

England has been as shaped by the politics of nationhood as any other nation in the UK or in Europe. But it is also in a curious, anomalous position.

### **A nation without institutions**

It is not uncommon for the boundaries of European nation states not to map neatly on to national identities. But England is by far the largest nation in Europe to have no national institutions of government. We are so used to this that we hardly notice that there is no national budget for England. No cabinet committee coordinates English policy, nor does any civil service structure implement it. English legislation is not made by England's MPs alone nor, bar a brief experiment, has Parliament recognised England as a political nation. No English Minister – only the UK Prime Minister – is accountable (to the UK Parliament) for the condition of England.

This national lacuna and the legacy of Anglo-centric British unionism means that England is absent from the language of politics, the media and too much of academia. MPs and Ministers and journalists casually talk of Britain when referring to England alone. Academics often failed to distinguish studies of England from those of the Britain or the UK.

As by far the largest nation, England certainly dominates Parliament and UK governments, but in the absence of a distinct English system of governance, this has neither served the Union well, not given England good governance.

England-dominated UK governments have been consistently tone deaf to the aspirations of the smaller nations. The Thatcher and Johnson government were almost entirely dependent

on England's Tory MPs and their casual dismissal of the interests of other part of the UK deepened resentment against the union.

At the same time, England's chronic centralisation, the fragmented governance of Whitehall departments, the UK's Treasury's damaging micro-management of spending, and the rigid enforcement of financial accountability to the centre all stem from the habits of government formed by Anglo-centric British Unionism. Policy making and implementation is consistently poor and public money is wasted. Steps step towards devolution are restrained by the constitutional conservatism Westminster and Whitehall.

The politics of England's nationhood were most starkly evident in the Brexit referendum. The decision to Leave was swung heavily by England and by voters who said they were strongly English. For these voters, sovereignty and the control of immigration – issues at the heart of their ideas of nationhood - were decisive concerns. Those who campaigned for Remain offered no persuasive alternative national story, preferring to rely on transactional benefits. Brexit is a case study in the wider European failure to oppose national populism with alternative stories of the nation. (After the referendum the SNP gained ground with its own politics of nationhood - a narrative of Scotland as an independent European nation.)

Leave-Remain divided voters into tribes that linger today. If anywhere in Europe needs a shared story of nationhood it is England. Those of us who hope for a closer relationship with Europe would do well to consider less whether a new referendum might be won by dividing the nation in different ways and think more about how those contesting ideas of England can be reconciled.

For that, a new politics of English nationhood will be required.

### **A new politics of English nationhood**

A common misconception is that Englishness and Britishness are two distinct and well-defined identities that people may mix in different proportions. Political scientists like me, opinion pollsters and the census have sometimes been guilty of lazily propagating this idea.

But the relationship is more complex.

Probe the evidence more deeply and we find that those who are strongly and patriotically English are, even if they emphasise their Englishness, strongly and patriotically British as well.

Those who have little affiliation with English identity are often - though not always - only lightly patriotic about their Britishness.

It is better to think of identities in England as lying on a spectrum that runs from 'English with Britishness' to 'Britishness without Englishness'.

That spectrum is reflected in different conceptions of nationhood. The most English end of that spectrum first supported UKIP, delivered Brexit, and elected the 'Get Brexit Done'

government. It provides a disproportionate share of support for Reform UK in England today.

National sovereignty matters to the 'English with Britishness'. In truth, many would happily return to a unitary UK dominated by England, but, in the context of a devolved UK, they want English laws made in England.

The 'English with Britishness' have the strongest roots in and identification with those parts of the national community who feel they have lost most from economic and social change. Their nostalgia is not for imperial glory but for a time when their communities – and for many their class – mattered more than they do today.

Contrary to popular misrepresentation, they have become decidedly more socially liberal over the years; but they remain the most socially conservative part of the population, particularly on immigration. The gap in values between them and the most liberal and highly educated parts of the population (who tend towards British without Englishness) has widened. Led by the most liberal voters, our views of nationhood are not moving together but drifting apart

The challenge is to forge a shared nationhood that can embrace as much as possible of those contested ideas of England's nationhood. It needs to acknowledge the importance of pride and patriotism to some but without demanding it of everyone. It needs to recognise the importance of democratic sovereignty but within a nation committed to inclusion and pluralism. It's worth noting that a majority of all identity groups in England support English Votes for English Laws, suggesting that a national democratic agenda would have broad appeal. Nation building must find the shared national stories through listening to each other with respect, not through victory in a culture war. Those shared stories should include our common achievements like the establishment of the NHS.

### **Bringing England to the fore**

We cannot duck English nation building challenge by talking about Britishness instead.

Britishness is no longer the unifying national identity it might have been under empire. It comes in diverse forms: as the patriotic partner of Englishness and in the lightly held identity of those who care little about nationhood at all. In Wales and in Scotland, Britishness is often the identity of those who would prioritise the union over devolution. In Northern Ireland it is a marker of a still divided community.

To the extent that British identity can be said to be shared by all, it is only as a thin civic identity of citizenship that says so little about who or what Britain is that Britishness alone cannot bind us together.

The historic intertwining of England and Britain means that England's identity will always be partly British, just as Scotland's identities will primarily be Scottish and British and those of Wales, Welsh and British. Northern Ireland – now occupying a unique constitutional relationship with the EU and the rest of the UK – will be different again.

The challenge in England is to bring English identity to the fore; to give it a proper place in the life of the nation. By doing so we can hope, as we hope for other European nations, to create a more expansive, more inclusive and richer sense of English nationhood than that offered either by the national populists or the thin gruel of liberal civic nationalism.

It is when England and the English are absent from the nation's discussion, from politics, culture and everyday life that ideas of what it is to be English gravitate towards the more narrowly defined. Only on the sports field is England's diversity recognised and applauded (and even there, not all minorities are represented).

Those who English identity as manifested only as flags on lamp posts often overestimate the difficulty of shaping an inclusive Englishness. Far from being a creature of the racist far right, around 80% of England's residents identify strongly as English. Those who think you must be white to be English has tumbled over the past two decades to about one in ten. While ethnic minorities are less likely to identify as English, around a third do so strongly and many more think Englishness is open to them. In the right context – such as football – the national flag has as much unifying meaning to Muslims as anyone else.

The challenge is pressing. England weakened by division, and - as the recent elections showed - the UK's nations are both divided internally and moving away from each other. If the union is to survive it must continue the journey towards a genuine union of nations in which England can play a full but not domineering part. What happens in England will help determine the future of the UK.

#### **A shared story for the English nation**

We should take the principles I set out earlier in this lecture and apply them to England.

That would let us imagine

- a shared sense of English nationhood that will be essential for national cohesion and enabling governments to address the challenges facing England
- an inclusive English nationhood, that must reflect all the people, communities and culture who make up England today
- public policy designed for a cohesive England that will continually strive to ensure that all citizens enjoy a voice and a stake in the future
- a confident England able to see itself as part of a multi-nation Union

We might swiftly agree that this is not the England we live in today. But we might also agree that it is an England we would like to live in.

Once we have done that, we can work out together what we would need to do to make that England a reality.

Without English institutions a shared national story for England will remain beyond reach.

As a first step, the UK government would need to delineate the governance of England from that of the UK, creating a civil service dedicated to the delivery of English policy, and creating mechanisms for ministerial oversight and accountability parliament. English Votes for English Laws would no doubt follow.

Political and civic leaders should help set out the vision of a shared sense of nationhood for England, one that seeks an inclusive telling of history, one that recognises the place of faith, and one that acknowledges the importance of democratic sovereignty. We need government to re-state its abandoned commitment to a pluralist, multicultural nation, but one in which all voices – including those of the white working class, and of the cities and regions – can be heard.

With new democratic institutions, the practical reclaiming of sovereignty can be addressed – England as a nation within the Union, and a UK that seeks international collaboration as a sovereign union of nations. The pursuit of UK economic sovereignty must enhance the sovereignty of its nations too. As we find our shared values, we can ensure that they are embedded in the design of public policy so that the welfare state enhances cohesion and does not undermine it.

### Conclusion

In this lecture, I've argued that Europe's politics, and those of the UK, have been reshaped by the politics of nationhood. Too often this finds expression in national populism. And it will continue to do so until we recognise the need for alternative, inclusive and rich ideas of nationhood. This is as true of England as of any other nation.

In this process, government must lead, but it is not for government, let alone for me, tonight to set out what our shared national story or our shared national values will be. We can only build England's future together. But, 20 years after my first visit to Woolf, I can only ask why we have waited too long to start the process.