

Beware the patriotism peddled by scoundrels at home and abroad

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Tyneside-born academic Paul Benneworth - who lives in the Netherlands - says people in the EU are free to be patriots



11 year old Roosmaryn V, from Renkum, lays flowers on the grave of Private Saxelby, 19, of the Durham Light Infantry, who died in 1944

One of the great timeless political adages is Samuel Johnson's remark that 'patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel'.

And in a far-sighted nuance to this early political soundbite, he added that the true patriot is motivated not by a love of national institutions such as monarchy, but the greater collective good of the whole nation.

With Donald Trump now joining George Galloway, Nigel Farage, Marie le Pen and Vladimir Putin as those in favour of Britain leaving the EU, I can detect much of the Brexit camp's faux patriotism seeping in from modern politics' 'scoundrel fringe'

Much anti-European propaganda is crudely dressed up unilateralist Union Jack waving. There's an unappealing dog-whistle of sending in the gunboats to unilaterally sort out tricky foreigners channelling Michael Portillo's tone-deaf 'send in the SAS' comments two decades ago to the Tory conference.

That's nothing more than the patriotism of scoundrels, appropriating our forefathers' ultimate sacrifices for their own shabby advancement in unsavoury right-wing circles. A true patriotism – defined through collective interests – would be much more sparing of the lives of those we ask to defend those interest.

This acquired a personal dimension this week with our annual Dutch remembrance day commemoration. The Dutch village where I live has a Commonwealth War Grave, belonging to the RAF Flying Officer Edward Donne, shot down in active service in [World War II](#).

He died on April 1, 1945, aged just 21, less than six weeks before the end of hostilities in the Netherlands. Although the Dutch ceremony officially commemorates all victims of Nazi aggression, our ceremony in Lonneker recognised Fg Off Donne's sacrifice by placing wreathes in the name of all victims at his grave.

The two minutes silence provided ample time for remembering the collective efforts and tremendous personal sacrifices of both Dutch resistance who undermined the occupiers, and the Allied heroes who smashed the Nazi terror. And 'Abide with Me' echoing around the churchyard reminded us that we inherited their victory, of a modern peaceful Europe embodying the values for which they gave their lives.

The Netherlands quickly realised that preventing a repeat of the horrors of WWII's occupation, resistance, and hunger required building a sense of a bigger collective than the purely national, recognising international efforts behind their liberation.

The Netherlands has driven the ever closer union of the peoples of Europe enshrined in today's European Union. In 1947, they set up a union with Belgium and Luxembourg, and in 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community with West Germany, Italy and France that evolved into the EU.

But the Netherlands has not just embraced a crude universalism where a European identity trumps everything and the monarchy is a dirty word. The Dutch national identity and the House of Orange remain as strong as ever, and the Dutch Tricolor woven into the commemoration wreathes this week highlights patriotism sitting comfortably with internationalism.

This reflects a reality that an independent Dutch nation depends on broader international stability. European connections, the European Union itself, provides peace guaranteeing neither British nor Dutch patriots must again spill their blood to protect our communities.

People are free in the EU to be patriots, to value their national institutions and to seek to better the lot of their national communities. Such honest patriotism does not demand that our modern generation sacrifice their own lives for peace, but rather builds on the legacy built by Fg Off Donne.

So beware the scoundrel's dog-whistle patriotism in the coming EU referendum. Make sure you vote for not to risking our troops' lives in the future to the benefit Boris's greasy pole climbing, but for all our freedom to collectively live the best lives we can!

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