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THE UK AFTER BREXIT:

CAN AND WILL THE ANGLOSPHERE REPLACE THE EU?

DR. ANDREW MYCOCK

*University of Huddersfield
West Yorkshire, England*

DR. BEN WELLINGS

*Monash University
Melbourne, Australia*

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The UK after Brexit:

Can and Will the Anglosphere Replace the EU?

Andrew Mycock and Ben Wellings

Brexit thrust the Anglosphere idea into the centre of British politics. In its related guise of 'Global Britain' it is currently helping to reshape the UK's relationship with the EU and the rest of the world. Its main appeal to Brexiteers was and is as an alternative to UK membership of the EU. As an idea it is not just about international relations but is part of a wider, transnational contestation within the domestic political systems and part of a series of 'culture wars' fought out within the English-speaking nations. This combination of international and domestic politics starts to explain the appeal of the Anglosphere idea to Brexiteers. The short answer to the question whether the Anglosphere can and will replace the EU for UK foreign, trade and security relations is 'no'. The pertinent question then becomes why did such an idea enter into Brexiteer calculations before and after the referendum of 2016? The answer to that question lies in the place that what we might call 'the Anglosphere tradition' plays in British – and increasingly English – politics.

Since the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in 2016, one of the UK government's persistent claims is of a post-EU world where the UK's trading relations are facilitated by a series of free trade agreements. There is some credence to this idea, given the support given by President Trump during his state visit to the UK for a 'phenomenal' trade agreement as indicated in the (US-UK Trade Negotiations Mandate). Similarly, the Australian government has spoken of the possibility of a quick 'one-page trade deal' between Australia and the UK once the latter leaves the EU. The New Zealand government has also said that a free trade agreement can be quickly concluded with the UK after Brexit is enacted. In short, the Anglosphere might appear to be a better 'fit' for English-speaking countries when compared to regional forms of integration, not least in Britain's case, the European Union.

Two new works published in 2019 explore the idea of the Anglosphere and how this played into the politics of Brexit. The first of these works, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere* (Manchester University Press) by Ben Wellings shows how the ideas about the Anglosphere operated as an alternative to membership of the European Union before and after the 2016 referendum. The second work, a volume edited by Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location* (published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the British Academy) explains the historical genesis and contemporary manifestations of the Anglosphere idea and its (misguided) appeal to Brexiteers and those dealing with the policy implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.ⁱ

WHAT IS THE ANGLOSPHERE?

The Anglosphere is a new word for an old idea in British politics. It is this longevity that gives it some of its appeal and legitimacy amongst Brexiteers. In institutionalised terms it has existed since the treaties establishing the Five Eyes signals and intelligence sharing networks in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Its lineages extend back through the twentieth century and back to the period of imperial expansion and the Scottish Enlightenment (Kenny and Pearce, 2019; Gardiner, 2019).ⁱⁱ Its advocates suggest that its origins lie further back in the constitutional-military struggles of the seventeenth century and as far back as the establishment of Magna Carta in the thirteenth century (Hannan, 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ

However, since the late 1990s a small but influential group of senior politicians, insurgent fringe parties, public intellectuals and commentators on the right of politics from across the English-speaking countries have mounted the argument that the world will be a safer and better place if the core Anglosphere states – the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – cooperate and coordinate action in international affairs. Despite being heavily influenced by a muscular liberalism, the Anglosphere remains a love that dare not speak its name. This is because it struggles to shake of the racist tones of its ideological forebears. The idea is most popular on the political fringes and, intriguingly, amongst patricians and grandees amongst the right wings of centre-right parties. It has been boosted by transnational Anglosphere networks that extend security cooperation and can be discerned

in domestic politics too (Legrand, 2019).^{iv} The idea that a post-Brexit UK could become a highly de-regulated 'Singapore-on-Thames' is a domestic manifestation of the foreign policy dominated Anglosphere idea (cited in Leonard, 2016).^v For its supporters, the Anglosphere encompasses an extensive, but ill-defined, Anglophonic community. This community is seemingly bonded by a shared language and associated forms of literature, culture, sport, media and familial ties. In its regular and public forms, it is enacted through the mutual commemoration of past and present military conflicts (Mycock, 2019).^{vi} An ascription to a 'civilisational' heritage founded on the values, beliefs and practices of free-market economics and liberal democracy forms its ideological core. Along with the 'core states mentioned above, it sometimes includes India, Singapore and the West Indies in its scope. South Africa, hugely important in the 19th century imperial imagination rarely gets a mentioned. Ireland is sometimes included in its imaginary, but the dominant (and hostile) attitude towards memory of the British Empire (and pro-EU political elite) means that it is usually excluded. This of course be true of India and the United States and point to the incoherent nature of its articulations but this does not detract from its common-sense appeal.

Although the term 'Anglosphere' is a recent addition to the vocabulary of British foreign relations (subsumed by the slightly less disconcerting 'Global Britain'), interest in Anglosphere transnationalism is not new. According to Srdjan Vucetic, the word itself was first recorded in 1995 and added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2007.^{vii} The origins of today's Anglosphere are usually located in the late 19th century when imperial federation was proposed as a response to the growing political instability within the British Empire and growing competition from external rivals, including the United States (Kenny and Pearce, 2018; Bell, 2019).^{viii}

There is a risk of taking a neologism like the Anglosphere and pushing the idea back into the past. Nevertheless, empire looms large in the genealogy of the idea. The notion of 'Greater Britain' – a nation that extended beyond the British Isles and into the Dominions of the British Empire gained ground in the mid-19th century. In a brief period from the early 1880s until the First World War, advocates argued for the establishment of a transnational union of the 'Mother Country' and its settler Dominions peopled by those of common British

'stock'. Plans for imperial federation from in 1880s did not bear fruit, but they did leave their imprint on subsequent developments in national consciousness and political design. The proposition of a 'Greater Britain' was critically undermined however by the reluctance of many within the British imperial metropole to embrace principles of egalitarian federalism. Ambiguities persisted amongst its proponents as to the membership of an imperial federation beyond Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Some sought some to include Fiji, the West Indies, and even India and the United States within this new organisation of 'English-speaking' peoples, despite Anglo-US tensions over Venezuela. Support for imperial federation receded after the First World War, which encouraged the intensification of autonomous Dominion and anti-colonial nationalisms which initiated the slow disintegration of the British Empire. The Second World War accelerated this change. The 'New Commonwealth' governments that emerged during the period of decolonisation rejected the racialised parameters of 'Greater Britain'. Finally, the UK's accession to the European Communities appeared to signal the end of the British Empire as an important component of the international order. Many assumed that the Anglosphere idea had had its day.

WHERE IS THE ANGLOSPHERE AND WHY DOES IT HAVE SUPPORT AMONGST BREXITEERS?

Yet despite the geo-political reorientation towards the emerging European communities, the concept of the 'English-speaking peoples' was never universally rejected as a meaningful geopolitical and transnational community, either in the UK or across the Anglophone world. As noted above, by the late 1990s, the Anglosphere was advanced as an idea by an influential international alliance of predominantly conservative politicians, commentators and public intellectuals who shared an insurgent ideological and geopolitical agenda that informed ambitions for an alternative world order. The most prominent of these advocates was American businessman James C. Bennett, who argued that shared history, culture, and language meant the Anglosphere was uniquely placed to exploit the technological, social and economic opportunities of the 21st century.^{ix} Bennett's views were predominantly technocratic. However, historian Robert Conquest took this idea in a more political direction and suggested that a future Anglosphere union should be 'weaker than a federation, but stronger than an alliance'.^x

Thus, Anglosphere is an idea more than a polity or existing international organisation. Although it rests on a putative (or regenerated) consciousness, the Anglosphere is not fanciful and owes much to a Cold War Anglo-America view of world order.^{xi} One of the core elements of Anglosphere is the 'Five Eyes' intelligence-sharing network, a multilateral treaty for joint SIGINT co-operation signed in 1947 which binds the UK, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Such military links are supplemented by at least 23 formal policy networks between these five states and an unknown number of informal networks that exist between political parties, think-tanks and other vested interests within the core Anglosphere (Legrand, 2016).^{xii} In this guise (the Five Eyes and bi-lateral UK-EU post-Brexit intelligence sharing) the Anglosphere will complement rather than replace cooperation within the Justice and Home Affairs pillar as the UK adapts to its new position as an outsider in EU intelligence sharing.

But not everyone saw the EU and the Anglosphere in terms of complementarity. The Anglosphere idea was especially attractive to Eurosceptics in the UK: the emergence of right-wing Euroscepticism in the UK from the early 1990s encouraged and required a renaissance of Anglosphere idea as an alternative to membership of the European Union.^{xiii} The idea gained traction when the Conservatives came to power as part of a coalition government in 2010. Leading figures, notably Foreign Secretary William Hague and then London Mayor Boris Johnson, sought to exemplify the potential of the Anglosphere as a counterweight to Europe by seeking to intensify links with conservative-led governments amongst Britain's 'traditional allies' in Australia, Canada and New Zealand to complement and enhance the UK's relations with the EU and its other member-states.^{xiv} There were domestic drivers to this attempted foreign policy realignment. The electoral success of the UK Independence Party in European Parliament elections from 2009 advanced the idea of the Anglosphere in three ways. Firstly, UKIP put pressure on the Eurosceptic right of the Conservative party and increased the need for an alternative to the economic and strategic benefits of EU membership. Secondly, UKIP explicitly named the Anglosphere as the basis of its foreign policy in 2015 UK general election manifesto. Lastly, during the Brexit referendum, senior Conservatives who were aligned with the 'Leave' campaign – notably Michael Gove, Daniel Hannan and David Davis – also made explicit reference to the

potential of Anglosphere. Thus, the Anglosphere provided a point of commonality amongst those campaigning for Brexit.

The political appeal of the Anglosphere to British Brexiteers is as much (indeed perhaps more) ideological than geopolitical. Proponents argue that the Anglosphere will afford opportunities to reject European social democratic values and norms – large welfare states, strong trade unions and high taxation – in favour of shared ascription to the tenets of neoliberalism or ‘Anglobalisation’, and the shared values of liberal interventionism. Geopolitically, the Anglosphere’s supporters seek to re-establish and re-intensify Britain’s economic and political links with former colonies, Dominions and other non-European states which will ‘unshackle’ the UK from the perceived (economic) constraints of the EU.^{xv} Militarily, this implies a more Atlanticist approach to European security (NATO membership is unproblematic for Brexiteers), a position exemplified by the UK’s decision to participate in Syrian intervention in 2018.

The result of the EU referendum saw ‘Anglospherism’ shift from aspirational advocacy on the fringes of the right to the centre of British politics, as the UK government has sought to re-imagine existing diplomatic, trade and security relationships. In her Lancaster House address in January 2017, Theresa May argued that a ‘profoundly internationalist’ post-EU ‘Global Britain’ should draw on its distinctive national history and culture to ‘build relationships with old friends and new allies alike’.^{xvi} Her desire to reaffirm and strengthen ties with such ‘old friends’ has focused on the belief that a series of trade deals could be quickly concluded across the ‘Anglosphere’ once the UK leaves the EU. To this end, senior UK government figures made high-profile visits to Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as well as India (sometimes included amongst Anglosphere states). During a visit to the United States in January 2017, May and President Trump declared a shared commitment to reframe the ‘special relationship’ after Brexit. They emphasised that stronger ties would be founded ‘on the bonds of history, of family, kinship and common interests’^{xvii} This point was reiterated during Trump’s two visits to the UK in 2018 and 2019.

WILL THE ANGLOSPHERE REPLACE THE EU?

Domestically, there is evidence that the Anglosphere resonates with the British public, especially 'Leave' voters.^{xviii} Yet there are significant barriers to realising the Anglosphere vision. There was and remains a lack of agreement regarding the constituent states of Anglosphere. Many of the most vocal proponents have recently sought to re-frame the Anglosphere around a network of core constituent 'Crown countries' that comprise of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK (or 'CANZUK'), down-playing the role of a more protectionist USA, notwithstanding the special treatment that appears to be directed at the UK that plays into Trump's anti-EU agenda. But others, notably Liam Fox the UK's International Trade Secretary, sought to frame the Anglosphere in terms of a new Anglo-American alliance re-asserting its global dominance.

The immediate diplomatic goal for UK-based Anglospherists as the UK exits the EU is to line up new free-trade agreements to soften the economic rupture as and when the UK leaves the Single Market. To this end, UK government ministers have stressed that Australia, Canada and New Zealand are (all) 'at the front of the queue' once Brexit is realised and any transitional phase has passed. But also, Global Britain has re-awoken a dormant 'Anglo-scepticism': senior Australian figures have suggested that they like Britain, but have expressed scepticism towards the 'Global Britain' idea (Rudd, 2019).^{xix} Others analysts have questioned the professed benefits of new trade deals across the Anglosphere. The hyper-global emphasis on 'global' trade amongst Brexiteers and Anglospherist went against the more recent trend of de-globalisation and the regional integration of national economies. With regards to the economic potential of the Anglosphere, Ravenhill and Heubner stated that 'geography trumps history' (Ravenhill and Heubner, 2019).^{xx} The challenge for the UK government, they concluded, is not to agree 'better' free-trade agreements with core Anglosphere states, but simply to replicate the terms and number of existing deals the UK enjoyed as a member of the EU.

For many British proponents, greater engagement with the Anglosphere is congruent with a desire to rejuvenate the Commonwealth through the development of trade links with

emerging economic ‘powerhouses’, particularly India.^{xxi} Such intentions reveal, however, historical and contemporary complexities, both in geopolitical relations between the core Anglosphere states, and in the pervasive resonance of the issues of racism and neo-colonialism across other parts of the former British Empire. The UK government’s trade mission to India in November 2016 revealed the tensions around establishing new trading relationships and any reciprocal movement of labour that such agreements might entail. Donald Trump’s offer of a ‘phenomenal’ trade deal to a post-Brexit UK is important to Brexiteers, but ‘America First’ does not sit well with multilateral ideas.

Conversely, some Commonwealth leaders have expressed doubts regarding the possibility that new trade deals with the UK could have a detrimental impact on their own economies, stimulating memories of the exploitative nature of empire. Advocates of the Anglosphere blend imperial nostalgia with historical myopia in their projection of an overly positive and largely uncritical understanding of the legacies of the British colonial past. Yet it is the memory of empire and the relationship of nationalism to it that presents one of the major barriers to the Anglosphere vision. For some, the post-Brexit ‘Global Britain’ vision is akin to ‘Empire 2.0’. Indian MP and senior UN adviser Shashi Tharoor argued that the post-Brexit UK government appears to suffer from a nostalgia-infused post-imperial ‘amnesia’ that negates engaging with its post-colonial responsibilities.^{xxii} Similarly, British historian, David Olusoga, argued that plans for Britain’s post-Brexit trading relationship with the Commonwealth are informed by a nostalgic yearning for wealth and global influence which is more akin to a ‘neo-colonial fantasy’.^{xxiii} Both arguments show how national interest and national identity complicate the idea of the Anglosphere as a meaningful entity and doom any sense of post-Brexit cooperation with the Commonwealth (Eaton, 2019).^{xxiv} New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Adern’s response to Donald Trump after the Christchurch murders show that there are tensions in the political alignments of Anglosphere leaders and hint at the differing domestic projects at play underneath professions of commonality.

For Anglosphere advocates that commonality stems from the past and a commitment to representative government, free trade and a memory of being on the side of right in the conflicts of the 20th century. These values are seen to transcend nationality and ethnicity. British Anglosphere advocates stress the importance of a common past with Canada,

Australia and New Zealand. However, shared sentiment amongst the populations of the Anglosphere states that they were ‘made in England’ has diminished and fractured considerably in the wake of successive waves of immigration.^{xxv} Moreover, intensely national conversations about questions of citizenship, identity and community rarely invoke Anglosphere links (see *Discovering Canada/Decouvrir le Canada*, 2009 for an exception),^{xxvi} particularly in their consideration of the devastating impact of colonisation and settlement on indigenous populations.^{xxvii}

CONCLUSION

The dominant form of Anglospherism in the UK remains strongly associated with antipathy towards the EU. But British proponents are guilty of prioritising British national self-interest while overlooking the diverse geopolitical and economic interests of the other Anglosphere states. This does not mean a post-Brexit intensification of the Anglosphere idea will materialise once the UK leaves the EU. It is likely that the UK government will prioritise a series of bilateral trade deals across the Anglosphere – in part through economic necessity, but also to legitimate Brexit to domestic businesses and voters. Moreover, counter-terrorism will continue to legitimate and strengthen ties between the ‘Five Eyes’ states. Yet, distinctive regional contexts and economic interests, together with a shared ascription to the defence of national sovereignty, may encourage pragmatism and stymie calls by Anglospherists for closer political ties. But the Anglosphere project is about ideology as much a pragmatism and about domestic politics as much as international relations, so such consideration may be de-emphasised if the Conservatives remain in government. The Conservative leadership contest of June-July 2019 featured many Anglosphere advocates as candidates although, as expected, we heard little of the Anglosphere by name. Instead it was present in its policy transfer manifestations as when Boris Johnson touted the value of an Australian-style immigration system or when candidates held up the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) as a model of post-Brexit UK-EU relations.

Ultimately, however, the UK needs friends, and therein lies the appeal of the Anglosphere amongst Brexiteers that will extend beyond trade considerations. The Anglosphere is an

idea with a long provenance in British politics. It will not replace the EU in terms of economics, but it is not about maximising gains in that way. It is an ideological movement that seeks to re-orient regional and global orders that is playing out most visibly in the contest over Brexit.

NOTES

ⁱ The Proceedings of the British Academy 226 drew on a conference held at the British Academy on 'The Anglosphere and its Others: The "English-speaking Peoples" in a Changing World Order', held on 15-16 June 2017, was convened by Professor Michael Kenny, Dr Andrew Mycock and Dr Ben Wellings.

ⁱⁱ Michael Gardiner, 'The Anglosphere as a Principle of Progress,' in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel Hannan, *Inventing Freedom. How the English-speaking Peoples Made the Modern World*, (London: Harper Collins, 2013).

^{iv} Tim Legrand, 'The Past, Present and Future of Anglosphere Security Networks: constitutive reduction of a shared identity', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^v Mark Leonard, 'What would a UK outside the EU look like?' *The Guardian*, 5 October 2015: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/05/brussels-eurosceptics-british-voter-out-lobby>, accessed 2 July 2016.

^{vi} Andrew Mycock, 'CANZUK, the Anglosphere(s) and Transnational War Commemoration: the centenary of the First World War', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{vii} Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford University Press, 2011); Srdjan Vucetic, 'The Anglosphere beyond Security' in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{viii} Michael Kenny and Nick Pearce, *Shadows of Empire: the Anglosphere in British Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018); Michael Kenny and Nick Pearce, 'Churchill, Powell and the Conservative Brexiteers: the political legacies of the Anglosphere', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit. Duncan Bell, 'Anglospheres: empire redivivus?', in *The Anglosphere: continuity,*

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^{ix} James C. Bennett, *The Anglosphere Challenge: Why the English-Speaking Nations Will Lead the Way in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

^x Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

^{xi} Andrew Gamble, 'The Anglo-American Worldview and the Question of World Order', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit. Carl Bridge and Bart Zielinski, 'The Anglosphere and the American Embrace: the end of the British Empire and after', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{xii} Tim Legrand, 'Elite, exclusive and elusive: transgovernmental policy networks and iterative policy transfer in the Anglosphere', *Policy Studies*, 37, 5 (2016).

^{xiii} Ben Wellings and Helen Baxendale, 'Euro-scepticism and the Anglosphere: traditions and dilemmas in contemporary English nationalism', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53, 1: 123-139; Helen Baxendale and Ben Wellings, 'Underwriting Brexit: the European Union in the Anglosphere imagination', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{xiv} Ben Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere: wider still and wider*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

^{xv} Kwarteng, Kwasi; Patel, Priti; Raab, Dominic; Skidmore, Chris; and Truss, Elizabeth, *Britannia Unchained. Global Lessons for Growth and Prosperity*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

^{xvi} BBC News, 'In Full: Theresa May's Lancaster House Speech', BBC News, 2 March 2018: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-43256183>, accessed 4 July 2019.

^{xvii} Whitehouse.org, 'President Trump's and Prime Minister May's Opening Remarks', 27 January 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-trump-prime-minister-mays-opening-remarks/>, accessed 4 July 2019.

^{xviii} YouGov. 2016. 'Which countries should we focus on for our trade deals?' YouGov, 17 September 2016: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/09/17/which-countries-should-uk-prioritise-post-brexit-t/>, accessed 17 July 2018.

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^{xx} Ravenhill and Heubner, Jefferson, 'The Political Economy of the Anglosphere: geography trumps history', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{xxi} Eva Namusoke, 'The Anglosphere, Race and Brexit', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

^{xxii} Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India* (London, Penguin Books, 2017).

^{xxiii} David Olusoga, 'Empire 2.0 is dangerous nostalgia for something that never existed', *Guardian* (19 March 2017).

^{xxiv} Mark Eaton, 'Duelling Commonwealth: family of nations metaphors and Britain's post-Brexit global identity', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-019-09326-7>, 2019.

^{xxv} David Malouf, *Made in England: Australia's British Inheritance*, Quarterly Essay, (Melbourne VIC, Black Ink, 2006).

^{xxvi} Laura Tonon and Tracey Raney, 'Building a Conservative Nation: an examination of Canada's new citizenship guide, *Discover Canada*', *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 47 (2013).

^{xxvii} Katherine Smits, 'The Anglosphere and Indigenous Politics', in *The Anglosphere: continuity, dissonance, location*, Proceedings of the British Academy 226, Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock (eds.), op. cit.

The Cicero Foundation

Independent Pro-EU and Pro-Atlantic think tank

Founded in 1992

Hondertmarck 45D

6211 MB MAASTRICHT

The Netherlands

Tel. +31 43 32 60 828

Tel. +33 1 41 29 09 30

Fax: +33 1 41 29 09 31

Email: info@cicerofoundation.org

Website: www.cicerofoundation.org

Registration No. Chamber of Commerce Maastricht 41078444