From Robert Tombs  
Fellow  
Emeritus Professor of French History

1 December 21017

The Chairman,  
Foreign Affairs Committee.

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

I should be most grateful if you would allow me to clarify for the record two questions that arose at Wednesday’s session of your Committee, so as to avoid possible misunderstanding.

First, one or two members seemed to misunderstand my comment that we should not increase diplomatic representation in countries in which we would necessarily be in future less involved. This was interpreted as ‘neglecting’ or ‘abandoning’ those countries. I do not believe that what I said bears this construction, but I apologize if I did not express myself sufficiently clearly. We shall, of course, remain fully committed to those countries’ security as the leading European member of NATO.

Secondly, Mr Gapes made the point that at the moment Eurozone growth rates are predicted to be somewhat higher than ours in the short term. He wished this to be placed on record. I was not able to respond as you moved the discussion on, considering it irrelevant. If short term economic fluctuations are indeed largely irrelevant to our future relations with the EU – not least because Eurozone growth has been shown to have a relatively limited effect on the UK economy - long term economic trends are of course crucially relevant, and these are clear: the proportion of our total trade with the EU has been falling sharply since the beginning of the century (60% in 2002, 45% today), and it has been predicted to fall, even if we had remained members of the EU, to approximately the same percentage as before we joined the EEC in 1973. The counterpart of this downward trend is the rising trend of trade with the developing world. This must necessarily influence our future diplomatic strategy.

I would be happy to provide details on these points if it would assist the Committee.

Thank you again for having invited me to give evidence. I would be grateful if you would kindly bring this letter to the attention of the Committee, and place it on record.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Robert Tombs