



to the European project: Brexit, with one of its biggest cheerleaders being elected President of the United States. Despite this, and as the EU deals with a global pandemic, it appears to be not only still in one piece but also more united than ever before. With this in mind I was interested to speak with Anthony Gardner, former US ambassador to the EU, about his career and his thoughts on the EU's future relationships with the US and the UK.

Before arriving to study an MPhil in International Relations at Balliol in 1985, Anthony had already graduated from Harvard University with a BA in Government. He remembers Balliol fondly, though it proved a radical change from his time at Harvard. Upon receipt of a 15-page, single-spaced list of books, for example, he asked which ones were most relevant for his course. The response of 'Well, here, unlike Harvard, we don't spoon-feed our students – you're supposed to read them all and figure out which ones for yourself' came as quite a shock. And after Anthony took the comment 'You might want to rethink this' from his thesis advisor Professor Sir Michael Howard as a purely optional invitation, a friend had to elucidate for him the nuances of British understatement, explaining that his advisor was in fact telling him to rewrite the whole thing.

It was another Oxford Professor, Loukas Tsoukalis, who sparked in Anthony a lifelong interest in the European Union. After leaving Balliol, he completed a JD in Law at Columbia Law School, taking several modules in European law. A professor there recommended that he apply for an internship with the Directorate General for Competition Policy at the European Commission and he did so successfully. His positive experience in Brussels made him want to stay. He worked there as an associate at an international law firm, later moving on to firms in New York and Paris. His time in the legal profession was interspersed with diplomatic work. Between 1994 and 1995, he served as Director for European Affairs for the National Security Council in Washington.

At the turn of the millennium, Anthony took another change of direction. He began a career in finance, acquiring a Master's degree in the subject from the London Business School. He worked for several financial

# The future of the EU's relationships with the US and the UK

PPE undergraduate Amelia Wood (2019) talks to former US Ambassador to the EU Anthony Gardner (1985)



Anthony Gardner



Amelia Wood

The past ten years have seen the European Union face the most significant challenges since its inception. The lingering after-effects of the 2008 financial crisis meant that the decade began with a debt crisis across the continent. The middle years then forced the bloc to grapple with a migrant crisis that deeply divided member states, in addition to numerous acts of terrorism. The year 2016 brought with it two more threats

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firms, including six years as managing director of Palamon Capital Partners, a London-based private equity firm. But his interest in working in and with the EU had not faded. During President Obama’s second term in office, his wide-ranging expertise led him to being appointed as the US ambassador to the EU in 2014.

Reflecting on his time as ambassador, Anthony says that he is most proud of spearheading landmark data privacy reform which many thought would never pass Congress, let alone with the substantial majority it achieved. The legislation meant that online data could continue to pass freely between the US and the EU, while affording EU citizens far greater rights to protect their data before US courts.

But for Anthony, data protection is just one area of many where the mutual benefits of cooperation are obvious. He outlines others, including security and humanitarianism, in his book *Stars with Stripes* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), in which he discusses the ‘essential partnership’ between Europe and the United States. Hence, Anthony maintains, it is vital that the two superpowers continue to work in conjunction with one another. ‘Even if we can’t be aligned on all these issues, we should at least diminish points of divergence,’ he says; if we don’t, China would be more than happy to fill the gap, setting its own norms and standards, as it is already attempting to do for innovations such as facial recognition and video surveillance.

A line in his book describes his confidence in the US–EU relationship on the principle that ‘on the big issues, the views of the US and the EU converge far more than they diverge’ – but would this always be the case going forward, I asked? He acknowledges that the coming decades may see Europe assert its own distinct policy agenda. However, his Italian heritage means he doesn’t see that necessarily as a bad

thing. ‘I also feel Europe should be more self-sufficient; it is the only thing that corresponds with the richness of Europe’s history and aspirations. It should be able to stand up on its own two feet more often, and if that comes at the cost of disagreeing with the US more often, so be it.’ Going forward, he maintains the defining issue nations will have to grapple with is whether, in the words of Martin Wolff, they believe in ‘bridges down or bridges up’. The more the US and the EU can minimise their divergences and work together on common challenges like climate change, or even the pandemic, the better.

The same idea ran through our discussion of Brexit. While in his book Anthony bluntly calls the UK’s decision ‘one of the greatest acts of self-harm taken by a country’, in conversation he is more introspective: ‘It was a decision taken by a sovereign democratic country that deserves respect, and there’s no desire from the incoming [Biden] team to reopen that issue.’ He seems keener to look for ways in which the UK could be a potential partner to the US on issues it has already championed such as climate change, multilateralism, and human rights.

This theme of bridges down reminded me how the EU had navigated the numerous challenges it had faced over the past ten years:

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by championing interconnectedness above all else, even when the urge was to retreat behind national borders.

Yet the decade has also seen many other countries or leaders conclude that the opposite was necessary.

Donald Trump voicing an ‘America first’ policy agenda all the way to the White House was one of them.

After leaving his ambassadorial post in early 2017 following Trump’s election as President, Anthony struggled to watch from the sidelines as his work was dismantled. ‘It was like a four-year tooth extraction,’ he recalls. He felt the Trump administration and in particular his successor as EU ambassador sought to destroy the US–EU relationship for seemingly no end. This damage, as well as that to the US’s many other diplomatic ties, he thinks will be difficult to repair. ‘It is going to be very hard for us to go around preaching about democracy, good governance, anti-corruption, and climate change – who is going to believe us now?’

The experience led Anthony to jump back into politics and – despite promising his wife that he would never join another political campaign – join the Biden campaign for President.

While Biden succeeded, Anthony admits that his success does not spell the defeat of Trumpism. Although partly economic, he puts the cause of the popularity of Trump and those like him mainly down to division and unease that are largely cultural – a phenomenon being experienced across the Atlantic as well. While Trump’s alleged remedies have largely worsened these issues, Anthony remains positive that Biden can and will address them in office.

During our conversation, Anthony remarked on the great luxury of being able to study at Oxford and of being surrounded by smart, ambitious people. Having spoken with him and reflected on his varied and impactful career, I am confident his peers would say very much the same in relation to him.