11172023 Private Event Boris Johnson

**Private event**

**Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson**

**Introducer & Moderator: Jonathan Reichelt**

**Albufeira, Portugal**

**Friday, November 17, 2023**

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** As I said, our next guest needs no introduction. All of you have known Daniel from much longer than I have, but something I have learned over the past two years is that you cannot have a conversation with him without getting into politics immediately. Frank said: We need something political at this very special event, what can we come up with? So we thought about it, and we invited the former, and many here hope, future Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. There’s just one rule for all of us, you can’t take pictures. You can take pictures with Mr. Johnson later, I assume. It’s a private event, so no posting it. There’s only one rule for you. Obviously, since it’s a German crowd, don’t mention the war.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Which one?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Thank you very much.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I won’t mention that. Thank you. Good evening, everyone. Goodnight, everybody. Thank you very much for your generous introduction. It’s very, very wonderful for me to be here. A great honor to be in this distinguished gathering of the of the (Gotthardt?) family and friends. And I’ve been invited to salute the birthday boy, that’s what I’m going to do, Doctor Daniel.

**GUEST:** Professor.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Doctor Marburg and everything else, Heidenberg. Daniel, I can imagine that when I walked in, you were wondering: What the hell? What’s going on? Because a 50th birthday is normally a stressful event, or stressful enough without the arrival of a former British prime minister. We have a lot of former British Prime ministers. I want to assure you, assure everyone, this is not a case of mistaken identity. This is not an accident. They weren’t trying to get Boris Becker. I’ve been summoned because I know exactly how you feel on this occasion, and because I have a message for you.

It is a message of hope. In fact, ever since leaving office, I’ve been running an international relief agency. Together with my team consisting of Shelley Williams-Walker over there and lots of other UK prime ministers, we fly around the world offering comfort and succor, encouragement, emergency assistance to the needy and the distressed, and it’s modeled on Médecins Sans Frontières, and it’s called Anglais sans Argent. You have to have a French accent. You already imagine if you’re running a conference of gastroenterologists and suddenly the speaker doesn’t turn up because he’s got food poisoning, what do you do? You call Anglais sans Argent.

Suppose you’ve got an epic birthday party planned for your son in Faro in Portugal, and you can’t get Angela Merkel, you can’t get Donald Trump, you’re worried that you can’t even get a gorilla graph or a stripper graph. What do you do? You call Anglais sans Argent. And like Médecins Sans Frontieres, we at Anglais sans Argent have seen some awful things, harrowing things. We don’t talk about what we see, but we believe at all times when we arrive in a in a crisis zone, it’ll be completely candid, completely straightforward with the people that we meet.

So, Daniel, on this occasion, it falls to me to tell you, the reality is that you are no longer in the first flush. It’s a terrible thing to say, but you are no longer, you are as Dante. You’re Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita. You have achieved what is, by historic standards, a prodigious age. 50 years, half a century. There are only 40, by my math, 40 of Daniel Gotthardt’s half centuries between us now and the dawn of the Christian epoch. There are only 60 half centuries between us and the very beginning of literacy, history itself. You have therefore personally surveyed about 2% of the entire recorded story of humanity, and by the creaking of your knees and the very slight graying of your temples, you may be tempted to give way to gloom and pessimism.

You may be saying to yourself: Perhaps I never now will never play football for Germany, and I never will —well, maybe you already have— won a Nobel Prize for gastroenterology. You may be saying to yourself, it’s never going to happen. You may think that you are now teetering at the top of a great Alp, a Jungfrau, Matterhorn that represents your career in its structure. Though you have many years to go in which you can figuratively enjoy the Glühwein in the ski hut, you may feel the shades of the afternoon are starting to lengthen, and it won’t be all that long before you will be called upon to make that last great long schuss back to the chalet. The final schuss. I’m afraid that last moment can come very suddenly, as they said of a famous skier who died not so long ago. He went downhill fast at the end.

So if you are tempted, Herr Doktor Daniel Gotthardt, if you are tempted to give way to such morbid reflections, I want you to know on behalf of the great agency, Anglais sans Argent, who sent me here, that all of us in the global, emergency cheering up community believe that you’re wrong. I’ve been summoned here because ten years ago, almost ten years ago, I turned 50 myself, almost 59. The message I have for you, that wasn’t the beginning of the end, that was the end of the beginning. In fact, it was the moment when things really started to turn out right.

I turned 50, and after years of literary mediocrity, I wrote a number one bestseller. Since turning 50, I’ve been a foreign secretary, I’ve been prime minister of United Kingdom, I’ve taken Britain out of the European Union, I organized the fastest vaccine vaccination program in Europe. Faster, even, I’m proud to say, than Germany, and the fastest exit from lockdown, and played my part in helping to save Ukrainian democracy from total destruction at the hands of Putin. And amongst other things, since the age of 50, I have had three more children, bringing my total to eight. And if I can do it, my message is even Herr Doktor Daniel Gotthardt, you can do even more.

You have so many advantages. You’re a man of science and medicine who has been a stunningly successful entrepreneur. You understand how new technology such as artificial intelligence, AI, can be used to prolong life. You’re known to be a conservative, which is a fantastic thing. Here’s an observable truth that everywhere and always, conservatives are happier and better adjusted, and therefore longer-lived. The truth is, we live longer on the right, and we’re generally happier, and we’re nicer to each other. Above all, you are famous for the strength of your loyalty to your friends and family.

I’m sure that all those lucky few of us., it’s a very select gathering. All those lucky few of us who’ve been invited here tonight will want to join me in wishing you a very happy birthday and many happy returns. And as the Romans used to say to anyone attaining the age of 50: May you have a hell of a party. Have a good time. Cheers!

**GUEST:** Prost!

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Prost! Thank you. That was a very long speech, but we covered a lot of ground.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It was a very short speech for German standards.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I have some German ancestry, actually, I’m proud to say. From Munich and from Stuttgart, it turns out. The BBC discovered it.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** And was it true?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, it was. It was a man called— well, there were lots of them. There was a man, it was Freiherr Karl von Pfeffel, and he was related to my great to the eighth grandfather, who was a man called King Frederick of Württemberg, who Napoleon said was the fattest man in Europe. He was a very distinguished moniker, was my ancestor. Anyway, what do we do?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Thank you. Please, take this seat.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** This one here? Sorry.

**GUEST:** Yeah. This is okay.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Well, again, thank you very much for being here. The whole idea was that if we invited the German speaker, it would turn to a very boring evening, so we are eternally grateful. You almost took away my first question, but I decided to ask it anyway. What is your advice? You’re at the end of your 50s.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** What is your direct advice to someone turning 50 Only a few hours from now?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I think obviously keep going with whatever you’re doing because it’s working. I think could you do— you got to try to keep doing new things and learning new things, I find you really need to. I learn a lot of poetry. (CROSSTALK.) All the obvious things. Keep fit. You are obviously you’re going to live to be 100 or more than 100, so that’s there. I’m sure you will. So the thing to do is to do it in the best possible health. I’m the worst person to ask. You’re a bunch of doctors, you should be telling me. You should tell me what am I doing. Maybe another day. I wouldn’t take up motorcycling or hang gliding.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Let’s talk about politics a bit, for Daniel and all of us who are very interested. We obviously live in crazy times. We’re witnessing a war in Ukraine, a terror war on Israel, an ideological war from within. We are witnessing woke-ism, cancel culture, people bringing down statues, people trying to silence—.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s happening in Germany as well?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It is happening in Germany as well. It’s like they’re canceling everything they can get their hands on. In that context, because Daniel, I know, is also a fan of Churchill. What does, "never surrender," in that context mean for us today?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think you’ve got to stand up for free speech and you’ve got to take these people on. It’s insane, you heard JK Rowling? JK Rowling, she wrote the Harry Potter books. She’s been totally written out of the script of history because of things that she said that most people in my country secretly agreed. All she says is a woman as a woman and a man is a man, which most people, when I was growing up, I thought that was an uncontroversial statement. But it’s now a very contested thing, and she is thought to have transgressed. You saw that she’s thought to have got it wrong, so she will not she’s not allowed to speak at major universities. That’s unbelievable. You said, "don’t mention the war." That was a very good joke. Here’s the tragedy of it, the BBC are cutting that episode because they think it’s— well, maybe you think they should, I don’t, it’s perfectly amusing.

Roald Dahl’s books. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. There’s a guy in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory called Augustus Gloop, the great big greedy nincompoop. He’s fat. The publishers of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory in the UK were saying that they want to get rid of the word fat or stop calling him words like fatty or because— I can see I’m losing you. You think that they’re right. But you need to be able to give offense, and people need to be able to take offense without necessarily banning, sacking, canceling those people. It’s all gone way, way, way too far.

On your points about democracy and what’s happening in the Middle East, what’s happening in Ukraine. I think that the problem is actually they’re connected because what’s happening is that if you’re Putin, you can point to the canceling of JK Rowling and you can say: Look at what Western liberal values means, it means censorship. They say we censor him; Putin can be censored. They say: Look, they’re banning all this stuff in Britain or around Europe. They’re stopping people from speaking their minds. They’re canceling people just because they have traditional family values and traditional understanding of relations between the sexes or whatever. We’re handing the totalitarians the stick they need to beat us with, and it’s a disaster.

The reality is the differences between us are massive. We’re actually democracies, we believe in freedom, we’re, I think, on the right side, both in the Middle East, and in Ukraine, and around the world. Germany and the UK are utterly indispensable. But the problem is, the middle ground, the swing voters, the Saudis, the sub-Saharan Africans, the Indians above all, the Chinese are gone. But the swing voters, they’re not necessarily with us. That’s the real tragedy. There’s a connection between the woke nonsense and our inability to be properly strong enough as Putin. Here’s what I’m saying—

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** You just said people now secretly agree with statements like: A man is a man, and a woman is a woman, and only men can be a man. Why secretly? What happened? That is not a view you had to hide three years ago.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I know.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Now it seems dangerous to people.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I know. I just don’t understand.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It, but why does it—

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m 59, as you pointed out earlier. All you, younger people, will understand. What happened? I don’t know. Is it like that in Germany?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It is the exact same.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Seriously?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It’s the same thing happening in universities.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, as I mentioned earlier, I’ve got loads of kids. I don’t want them going to school, whatever that means. It’s interesting because the ones in their 20s, my oldest daughter in particular, takes a totally different view from me. She thinks that I’m wrong and blah, blah. It’s just sodding— I’ve got to be more sensitive in my language. But I don’t want kids in there who are under the age of ten or even under the age of 14 or 16, being told that they can change their gender. I’m sorry to say. Or that it’s a matter of their own choice. Who thinks that’s a good idea?

**GUEST:** Seriously, that’s where we are now. So for Putin, for XI Jinping, for Tehran, for all the bad guys, this is hilarious. They’re laughing at us. Seriously, and all their people are laughing at us. They’re saying this is Liberal Western democracy. So we’ve got to find a way out of it, I don’t know, I can’t think of a solution. The solution I can think of is not to talk about it, so I try not to mention it.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Why did no one see us getting into that? Why did no one pay attention to universities? Why did people think it’s a joke to topple statues, to go after Churchill statues? What happened there?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think we were just weak. Also, we allowed people to forget history. That’s what the real problem. If you look at what’s happening in Britain today, in Britain we’ve got the same problem in all the great European capitals, most of them. But in Britain, you’ve got the BBC reporters, right? I’m getting jealous here. In Britain, you have huge marches now every Saturday, nominally in favor of Palestine, but actually they become the means, the vehicles to express a really nasty anti-Semitism, and it never used to happen. I think it’s totally wrong. I think we’ve lost; I think we’ve forgotten what happened in the Second World War.

But we’ve also got a tragic moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel. I think there is such an equivalence. If you’re on the streets of London every Saturday, there are people who are marching for Hamas without seeming to understand that they’re marching for terrorist murderers. And I don’t know what you think, but I think there is an absolute moral distinction, could not be clearer, between people who set out to torture, kill, rape, murder in the most horrific possible way on October the 7th, and the Israeli armed forces, the IDF, who are trying wherever they possibly can to stop that happening again, but also to minimize h loss of human life.

I can’t understand why people don’t see the distinction, but they don’t seem to, and it’s very, very frustrating. I think what’s happening is that antisemitism is a European virus. You know more about viruses than I do, but it’s the spore of the virus, the germ, the seed. In the UK, in London, there were anti-Semitic pogroms in 1066. It’s an ancient, ancient thing, and it comes up and it goes away again. It’s happening now in England, and it’s awful to watch it.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** We have the same. We have the same marches in Berlin.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I didn’t think they’d be as big.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** They’ve not been that big, but it was tens of thousands of people. Obviously, there is a huge and dominant anti-Semitism component to it. But what comes after? They demand the establishment of a Caliphate and Sharia all over Europe? Obviously, you were in political office for many years now and you know all the leaders of Europe, did we get something really, really wrong about immigration?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I’m not against immigration. As I’ve told you, my ancestry came from across Europe, from Turkey, from America, anywhere. I think we’re in a place called Albufeira, right? We’re near Albufeira?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Yeah.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, that’s a that’s an Arabic name, isn’t it? That’s an Arabic word. Muslims came here, they occupied it for about 700 years, the Iberian Peninsula. They did some great things. I think it’s not immigration per se, the problem is how you welcome people, how you deal with them. The big, big difference between modern Europe, Germany, UK, and ancient Roman Empire, or indeed the modern United States of America, is in the ancient Roman Empire and in the modern United States of America, you could be an immigrant, and they have many, many. But once you got there, you became Roman. No more barbarian nonsense. You either spoke Latin or Greek, you tweezed yourself and your bodily hair if you’re a Brit or a German, you used olive oil for almost every conceivable purpose, including shampoo, everybody ate the same vinegary sauce called garum, and there was a massive cultural homogenization.

And in America today, you have Arab Americans, you have German Americans, you have you have everybody. But they’re American, and they pledge allegiance every day, in their schools, they pledge allegiance to the flag. You could drive around America; you see the stars and stripes flying from porches all over the country everywhere. In the UK, if everybody flew the Union Jack, you’d all be accused of being nationalists. Seriously. I think the answer to immigration is to make sure that everybody feels they belong, and to ask people that they become truly patriotic for the country in which they have arrived. In ancient Rome, that meant you knuckled under, you became Roman —the key was Romanism— and you paid homage to the emperor, who was a great unifying figure. We don’t have that in modern Europe. Thank goodness. Ursula von der Leyen is wonderful, but she’s not going to command the universal respect and admiration of the people for the European.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Is there something to look up to in Europe? Because you just described many of our weaknesses; is there something?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. Many, many things. I think we’re decent, we’re tolerant, we’re welcoming, where we try to, we stand by and large, for the best values. But I think 30 years after the end of the Cold War, more than 30 years after the end of the Cold War, it looks like we’ve underrated the durability of autocracies. We really got it wrong. We thought they would all melt away, but they haven’t. We need to be tougher. We really need to be tougher. We’ve made some big mistakes. I’m afraid we have some— both the Hamas terrorism and what Putin is doing are connected to Iran. Iran is a massive problem for the world. Iran’s giving Putin loads of munitions and of course financing, supporting, training Hamas.

I think Europe is wonderful, but the only answer is American leadership. And all human organizations, institutions, whatever they are, require a leader. It’s just the way we organize things, there’s always a leader. And in the world, the leader has got to be American. When America isn’t the leader or America doesn’t accept its responsibilities, then things are pretty tough. I think we’re seeing a bit of that at the moment.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** So talking about America, two questions, because you have you’ve worked with two American presidents, President Trump and then President Biden. Two questions on them. The first question on Trump is, what is your most hilarious Trump story? Because I think we all want to know. The second question would be, do you think when we look at Biden and how weak he sometimes appears, does he still symbolize being that world leader to someone like you? We start with the first question.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** So Biden, no sorry, Trump. Trump is, of course is, German. What’s his first name? (CROSSTALK.) Look, I have to admit a great weakness, which is I like him, but even more damagingly, he likes me. It would just be catastrophic for my political career. He once came to Theresa May, who was one of my predecessors as prime minister, had him for a press conference in Chequers. The first thing he said was: When can Boris Johnson be prime minister? It was disastrous. Honestly, if you can survive the endorsement of Donald Trump, you can survive because he’s not really very popular in Britain. But I’ll tell you something, I think he is actually underrated as a foreign policy president.

I look back at the real problems we had. Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, who led? Who was in charge when Putin first invaded Ukraine in 2014? You will remember, wasn’t Trump, it was Obama, who did nothing. It was Barack Obama, the most inert, invertebrate president we’ve had for a long, long time. He’s going to be that that’s the truth. Who actually gave the Ukrainians javelins, anti-tank missiles even before the Brits did? It was Donald Trump. Similarly on Syria, who did nothing in 2013 when Bashar al-Assad poisoned his own case? Gassed his own people? It was Obama.

Whereas Trump, actually, if you look back at what happened in 2017, in Khan Shaykhun, he absolutely hammered Bashar al-Assad. He destroyed a lot of planes, and it was a big punishment. And to say it gently, Assad never used chemical weapons again. Trump is not the negative, isolationist, anti-intervention guy that people sometimes think. I think on Afghanistan, I just don’t think he would have done it in a way that we ended up doing. It was a disaster because it sent this signal to the world that we didn’t care, as in the Gulf. We’re talking about the swing voters, the people who are dubious about us now.

In the Gulf, when they saw us pulling out of Afghanistan like that, is complete chaos. So all these people who’d been basically put on the throne by British gunboats 100 years ago in Abu Dhabi, or in Qatar, or in Kuwait, or wherever. All of these people, the Saudis, we invented all these countries. They’re thinking, if they can do that to Ashraf Ghani, they can do that to me. They’re thinking, you know what? I want somebody dependable. So they look at the contrast. I would never say this in public, you mustn’t repeat. They look at Putin and they say: Well, that guy, he may be a monster, but he stood by Bashar al-Assad all the way, 12 years. The West kept saying: Bashar al-Assad must go, Assad must go, Assad must go. In the end, everybody went except Assad. All the west started to leave, and Assad stayed because he had Russian support.

I think when you look at that mistake by Joe Biden, I think it had some pretty bad consequences. I think that it was the Afghanistan withdrawal the summer of 2021, the lead pretty much directly to Putin’s second invasion of Ukraine. What I’m trying to say is that we have to be strong, we have to be united, and we have to keep reminding the Americans of their fundamental hegemony and why we need them to be strong, because there is no alternative. Until the European Union becomes a military superpower, which I’m afraid at the moment, dear friends, it shows no sign of doing. Thank God we have to rely on the Americans, and when they put their minds to it, they can be incredibly effective, but we’re going through a difficult period right now.

I do worry about what’s going to happen in Ukraine, I worry very much about Taiwan. Everybody can see the risks. On Trump, I’m not as panic stricken about a Trump because as you can tell, I have a sneaking admiration for some of the way he does things. I don’t think Trump will want to go down because I think he will win, by the way.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** You think he will win?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think he’s going to win. You heard it here. I think he beats Biden. Biden is going to get the nomination. Trump’s definitely going to get the Republican nomination. The way it’s going at the moment. Biden is a great guy, and I always had very good relationships with him, and we did a lot of good work together, but I think Trump’s going to be stronger in the campaign. I don’t think Trump will want to go down in history as the guy who let Putin get away with Ukraine. If you want to make America great again, he won’t want that on his record. So I’m hopeful that he’ll be strong, and we’ll see what happens.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** What are your thoughts when you look at Biden? It’s interesting because you’re also journalist, how unreported is the story that he does look in bad shape sometimes?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m almost embarrassed to say it, but I watched him just now in a press conference, was it with XI Jinping? Really wandering a bit. And I wonder, we all wonder about it, but it didn’t seem to me that he was in total command of his subject. I think he’s going to have it tough. Look, I think he was very good on Ukraine. Whatever else you can say, America has given $50 billion of equipment, of support to Ukraine. America has made all the difference. Without American support, I think it’s very likely that Ukraine would have been overwhelmed. I think that would have been an absolute tragedy for the world. Absolutely. It’s a European democracy, it would be a disaster. I think Biden finally got that right. Personally, I’ve become, I wasn’t always, I become a bit of a (green?).

Where are you on the green stuff? Are you an environmentalist?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes,

**GUEST:** That’s good.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think it’s the only sensible thing. There’re some people in my party now in the UK who are really going crackers about this. The headbangers who think we need more coal, more coal, oil. We’ve done all that.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Well, in Germany, the interesting thing about the greens in Germany is that they have abandoned nuclear power. So in Germany it’s the Green Party—

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Mike Duncan.

In Germany, it’s the Green Party that is now restarting coal because ideologically, they were anti-nuclear. I guess the green movement in Germany and your greens—

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Of course and it’s the— and in my party, it’s exactly right. In my country, Margaret Thatcher, you may remember, closed virtually all the coal mines in Britain in an act of purest environmentalism. Actually, it was because she didn’t like the trade unions. But she did the right thing. It’s now the right-wing of the Conservative Party who are calling for the coal mines to be reopened. I was with Biden on that, and I think that one way the West, us, G7, Germany, UK, America, we can beat the Chinese because in the end, we still have access to what we organize, the trillions and trillions of dollars of private sector investment.

The Chinese can do all their Belt and Road stuff, but we can help to trigger green investment around the world and to have a proper rival to Belt and Road. People are fed up with Belt and Road, and I think what we should be doing is giving people a genuine alternative and helping the private sector to invest in green technology in the developing countries. Biden was good on that. When we did the COP26 and the G7, we developed that agenda.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Let’s go back briefly to Brexit, because as you may have noticed, when you mentioned it, people got excited.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, say Brexit—

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Was it a good idea and would you recommend Germany do the same thing?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Taking two very good questions. It was and is a good idea, but it’s got to be done properly. There’s no point in Brexit unless you take advantage of it. I think we’ve done some good things with it. It is certainly true that the vaccines, we put the Pfizer and the AstraZeneca into someone’s arm two months before anybody else in Europe, because we are out of the Medicines Agency and the vaccine procurement system. There’s a small advantage, but it meant that we are able to come out of lockdown faster.

I think by March, by March 2021, my government vaccinated 45% of the UK population and the average in the whole of England, 10%. It was a massive advantage to get things done, to get the vaccination, and Brexit helped with that. Brexit has been used for with quite a lot of regulatory stuff, but we’re not doing enough, and we’ve made some mistakes. AUKUS is a very good idea. You probably don’t know what AUKUS is. AUKUS is a very good plan that I cooked up with the Australian Prime Minister and with Joe Biden. So Australia, the US, and UK share nuclear submarine technology. It gave the Australians a reason not to buy some French submarines. It caused a great deal of plaster to come off the ceiling in the Elysee Palace. Macron totally freaked out. We would never have done that without Brexit.

It was a very good thing to do, and there are lots of other little things that we’re doing there. What it needs is it needs a state of mind. Brexit is not enough on its own. The UK is grossly overtaxed at the moment and overregulated. The Irish have corporation tax? What is it? 2%. It’s ridiculous. We should undercut the Irish on something like that. We need to show we’re steering a different path.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Do you think the EU is still an attractive model? Because it seems it’s all bureaucracy and regulation?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, that was my objection, okay? I felt that the Democratic League was wrong for the UK, and I felt that we had no parliamentary system, and I felt that the world was a global market now. The EU consists of, I don’t know, 7% of the world population, a tiny chunk of the land mass of Eurasia. Why do why do we have to be confined to this block? Why do we allow it to determine all these things for us? These standards should, by the way, be global. Standards on automotives or whatever. I don’t know why you need Brussels to impose a law like that. I’m very suspicious of it.

But what the last few years have shown is that things can go bad. Whatever you say about the EU, I suppose you could argue that it helps to manage countries that might otherwise be more adversarial. I think it was very important after the Second World War, frankly, that Germany should find a way back into the great comity of nations. There should be a path for Germany to recover its status as a great nation, and the EU offered that. I think that was invaluable. The question is whether that’s now still necessary? Myself, I don’t think that there’s the slightest danger, let me put it that way of Germany becoming the Germany again of the early 20th century. That’s never going to happen again.

The process of European integration was founded on that suggestion. If you remember, Helmut Kohl, and Francois Mitterrand, and all these people always used to say: We have to do it. We have to create the euro. We have to. We have to advance the process of integration, a federal system, because otherwise Germany will be too strong and too frightening. And who knows what Germany will do in Eastern Europe. I just think it’s nonsense. Do you agree with me? The idea of a revanchist Germany, a total monster, that as a reason for continuing European integration strikes me as just rubbish.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Look at how peaceful it is.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** What I didn’t like about Brexit, honestly, was people’s feeling that the Brits were being chauvinist or hostile to other people. I didn’t like that. It’s been a mixed blessing, I would say.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Are there questions in the room for Mr. Johnson?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think you’ve covered it all.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** I have a few left, but I want to give you the chance.

**GUEST:** If there were a window of opportunity, would you go for Prime Minister?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, politicians are politicians. They’re just absolutely incorrigible in their self-delusion. You will never persuade them that they’re finished. They’re like cockroaches, they will continue to grow. I’ll see what happens, I think the odds must be very strongly against it. But then I used to say that I had more chance of being decapitated by a Frisbee, or locked in a disused fridge, or reincarnated as an olive than becoming prime minister, and I did become prime minister.

**GUEST:** (In German.)

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Simple question. We have different electoral systems, obviously, in the UK and in Germany. But one question many people ask themselves and would be interesting to if that concern also exists in the UK because it does in Germany, what if there will be an Islamist party?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, no.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Because it seems like a vast not Muslim, but Islamist community, obviously, there is a Muslim community. Apparently, hundreds of thousands of people who are not Muslim, but Islamists, that is a huge difference. Do you see that coming?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think there’s a greater risk, that is that an Islamist faction really becomes very important in the Labor Party. You could see when Corbyn was leader of the Labor Party that that was a real problem. He went down the wrong direction. That’s the risk. The answer is to do what I said earlier, you need you need a culture of integration. That’s what you need. I think it’s highly unlikely that an Islamist party, per se, will ever take off in the UK, because we don’t have a proportional system.

**GUEST:** Yes, we have.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Have you got an Islamist party?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Not yet. But there seems to be people who are strongly considering it, funded by Qatar.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Would it have any votes?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Well, there is roughly 5 million Muslims in Germany, so you could really see them make the 5% threshold. That seems realistic.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Most of them actually want to be part of the country.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** It seems so.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** And to succeed in the country that they’re in, and to become prominent Christian Democrat, social Democrat, whatever you got left now.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** That’s what it used to be, but it seems like with all the Turkish immigrants, they were very hard working first, second, third generation, fourth generation seems to be very much infected.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Why has it gone wrong?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** That’s why we invited you to get that answer.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I gave you the answer on immigration. You asked a good question, you said, where did Europe go wrong? Europe went wrong basically in 475 AD when the Roman Empire fell. The Roman Empire, which included this place we’re in now, was an enormous single policy, which was governed by the idea of political and cultural uniformity. It was a totalitarian system masquerading as a democracy of a kind, but it was incredibly successful. Somehow, we don’t do that in our countries anymore. We don’t demand people’s loyalty in the way they do in America.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know exactly when, but I think after the Second World War, all of our countries, for understandable reasons, were very hesitant about nationalism. Nationalism is a bad word for us Europeans. It’s a threatening concept. But unless you have some sense of togetherness. What’s togetherness in German?

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** (Zusammengehörigkeit?)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Zusammengehörigkeit! I thought it was Suzanne. Then it doesn’t work. If your culture is too diverse, then you’ll have a problem. At the moment, we’re going in the wrong direction. If they ever get into my country, it’ll be even worse.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Will they? It looks like it. Which would open the door for you?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know. It’s definitely not looking good at the moment, but I think the golden rule of politics in my country is don’t talk about British politics when you’re abroad. I don’t know, it’s a year to go. It’s a long time.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** A long time in politics. Are there any more questions?

**GUEST:** You mentioned that the one good thing about the EU.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, there are many good things.

**GUEST:** The one thing you had in mind was that it is good in keeping the Germans, the difficult Germans, somehow close to the west, to the Brits, the French and so on.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That was the argument that was always made.

**GUEST:** This Was, of course, the concern your predecessor, Maggie Thatcher, had 45 years ago at the Chequers conference, I remember. Are you more advanced on this after 45 years?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think that’s rubbish. I think that Germany is a great civilized nation and that idea that you had to tie Germany down, lock Germany in, keep Germany hedged about with the European Union institutions, I think that’s all history.

**GUEST:** Yes. Look, the Germans wouldn’t want the EU for that purpose. The Germans want the EU to have the great market. Everybody understands that the US is advanced of us because they have the giant market. This is good for economy and the EU is good for economy throughout the EU. There are many other reasons to see benefits in the EU. Is it all of the Britons or is it just you missing that point of more economical benefit for the lives of people?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, it’s very interesting you say that because if you talk about America and the EU, if you look back to the crash in 2008, I think I’m right in saying this. The US economy was worth about $15 trillion USD. The EU economy, even though it had about 580 million people, was much bigger, was about the same, $15 trillion. 15 years later, it’s very interesting to see that the EU economy has barely grown, maybe $17 trillion including Britain, and the US is now $25 trillion with far fewer people.

I don’t think it’s enough to say that the EU is good for the economy, to be completely honest. I don’t think it is. All the evidence seems to me to suggest that it isn’t particularly good for the economy. I think that we Europeans need to learn something about the dynamic American approach. When you go to America and you and you look at it, every state has an incredible capital city with a dynamic tech sector of one kind or another, great universities, huge proportion of the population in higher education and an immigrant culture but absorbing and homogenizing. We in Europe have much higher taxes, much higher social costs, much greater regulation, and much of it coming from Brussels.

So if you say that, that’s very little growth. I would respectfully contend that actually the EU model has not been dynamic. And the single market, you remember the Cecchini report in 1985, ‘86 or ‘84. It was earlier. None of that happened, we haven’t produced. Why is Elon Musk sending satellites around the world? I have to use Starlink in a village in Oxfordshire, it’s ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous. I massively increased gigabit broadband from 70% coverage, it’s everywhere except by bloody villages. Well, it’s there now, so I can get it down.

When I was a kid, it would have been absurd to say that we were going to be buying American cars. You remember American cars? They were ridiculous things with fins and about 30 feet long and they went about five miles to the gallon. Now, everybody’s buying American cars because they have a massive tech advantage. Tesla’s beating Volkswagen quite easily. I think we have to be humble about the EU approach. I think it has its good points, but I also think it’s very, very bureaucratic and I wonder whether we can afford it.

The problem is when I went through Brexit, the problem with EU law, this is my fundamental objection. Whatever I might think as a UK politician elected by the people of Uxbridge and South Ruislip, and no matter how many MPs I got to share my point of view, I could not change the law of my own country. We couldn’t do it in the House of Commons because that law was EU law, and it was a special class of law, and there was a huge and growing amount of it, and there was nothing democratic that you could do to reverse it or change it. That’s a massive problem. So when you say the EU is like America, it isn’t like America.

America is heavily overregulated, too, by the way, but somehow, they’re more successful, and they have greater flexibility, and that was the purpose of Brexit. Did lots of people or was it just me who ignored the economic advantages? I think everybody thought that a lot. When people voted for Brexit, it was the 17.2 million people. It was the biggest number of people who ever voted for any proposition in the history of the UK. I know there’s a general belief that maybe they were all idiots, but I think they weren’t. I think they knew what they were. I think they thought about it a bit, quite a lot.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** They thought it was time for a change. Now, I don’t think that Brexit has yet delivered enough, but I’m very doubtful that the British people will go back into the EU. Very doubtful. I still think that, increasingly, it was the right thing to do. But I acknowledge that there is a lot to be done. I just think it’s very, very mysterious that Europe, all of us, none of us have produced the big continental-wide champions in the way the Americans have. Apple, Tesla, Microsoft, all of these things, they’re globally dominant with far fewer people in America, and that’s that.

I think he’s worth thinking about it in a humble way. Also, by the way, you could compare Germany, the UK, Holland, France, even France. They are much, and not to say nothing on China and India, they’re much more heavily populated or densely populated. So the population per square mile is much bigger already. We have ancient centers of population. You fly over America, it’s mad. It’s huge, where is everybody? It’s fertile, it’s beautiful. I think America is still in its infancy as an economic actor. That’s why I think it’s so important that Americans should take political leadership.

It all sounds very pro-American. I am very pro-American. But that doesn’t mean that Europe also can’t play an incredibly important role, but it’s difficult.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** I saved the most controversial, toughest, and most political question for last. That is, are you team Harry and Meghan or William and Kate?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I actually think Harry and Meghan are very charming, and this is a very unpopular view. They came and did something for me when I was Foreign Secretary, and she was brilliant. Everybody laughs at me and says she just fooled me. She knew her onions, she was very polite, she did a very good thing on female education. I like her, what can I say? I thought she was quite good in that show called Suits.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Suits. Yeah.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think I’m not going to say anything more about the royal family because they’re not politics, and we’re lucky to have them. But did I say I was on team Harry and Meghan? That doesn’t mean I’m against William. The avoidance of doubt.

**JONATHAN REICHELT:** Well, we’re lucky to have you. Thank you very much for your time.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you.

**GUEST:** We would like to invite you to join our kitchen party on the two-star cook in this house now. There’s very nice red wine, too.

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