

# OPEN WORLD

## NEWSLETTER



**Dear Members**

*The international situation has changed dramatically over the last five years politically, economically and strategically. We now live in a more dangerous place. There is dictatorship in Russia while China and the United States add to this uncertainty. This is a major challenge for us liberals in UK, Europe and beyond. We need to respond according to our base principles of fairness, trust and humanity. We should not falter but stand firm against the far right and their allies. Exposing false information, exposing hypocrisy and pressing for radical but fair solutions are all essential.*

*There are three top priorities for the UK in my opinion: effective entry into a Customs Union with the EU, maintaining sanctions on Russia and our steadfast support for Ukraine and its people. We also need to hold the Labour governments feet to the fire over the defence of the International Development Budget.*

*As I'm retiring as Scottish Lib Dems' President at the end of December I should like to take this opportunity to wish all of our Liberal family a joyful Christmas and A Guid New Year*

**Willie Wilson**



**The far-right is a real threat to liberal democracy and cannot be ignored, agreed the panellists in our one day seminar in Edinburgh. From left: Lord Jeremy Purvis, Gillian Gloyer, Iain Smith (chair) and Jules Maaten.**

*Photo: Sally Robertson.*

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

**The November AGM on Zoom was well attended this year. It was particularly nice to see some new faces. Our Convener Iain Smith decided to step down and a new Convener will be elected in January. The committee thanked Iain and outgoing committee member John Barnett for all the work they have done for LI Scotland.**

Gillian Gloyer will continue as the Secretary and Outi Määttänen is the new Treasurer. The committee members are Willie Wilson, Jacqui Bell, Sal Robertson, Douglas MacDonald, John Edward, Daniel Coleman, Ben Munnoch and Sir Graham Watson.

Following the formal business of the AGM, Iain introduced the Guest Speaker, **Calum Miller MP**, the Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesperson. He outlined a number of challenges to multilateralism and the issues that the parliamentary foreign affairs team have been highlighting. Questions and comments followed, including on the UK's relationships with the USA, the EU and China, and on the importance of 'soft power' and international development funding.

# Jules Maaten: We must defend what we have achieved

*by Outi Määttä*

**Liberal democratic values are in serious danger in Europe. “We are not inspiring people anymore. We need to stop just reacting and become much more assertive, agenda setting. We must stop apologising for what we have achieved,” says Jules Maaten, regional director for Europe of Friedrich Naumann Foundation in an interview with Open World.**



Maaten, a Dutch Liberal politician and former Member of the European Parliament, was speaking in the LI Scotland one day seminar “March to the Right in European Politics” in September.

Working for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) in Brussels has given Maaten a ringside seat to the political developments in Europe. The origins of the FNF are quite unique: Since WW2 political parties in Germany have been able to start tax-payer funded foundations where the aim is voter education to encourage people to be politically active all the time, not just before elections. FNF is affiliated to the liberal German Free Democratic party.

Maaten has been watching the success of populist right wing parties in Europe with growing concern. He is worried about the slow response from liberal parties. He says: “There is nothing wrong with liberalism per se. But when populists talk about people, we talk about institutions, how democracy is organised and what type of electoral system we should have. People don’t care. They want to know if we can solve problems that they have. The extreme right and the extreme left both say it’s not complicated, it’s very simple”.

Seven European countries have right wing parties in government at the moment, mostly in coalition with other parties. The right wing are now organised and vocal in many bodies of the EU. They have also captured a new audience, particularly through social media.

Maaten takes Hungary as an example of an EU country with a right wing government. “They are not just very, very conservative. The country is moving towards authoritarian direction limiting freedom of media and political opposition. It’s scary, “ he says.

In the past, right wing parties were on the fringes, too weird to be considered as serious political decision makers and were practically ignored by the media for a long time.

This strategy, cordon sanitaire, was adopted by traditional parties in several countries. Isolating and refusing to work with the right wing, was regarded as the best way to keep them at bay. This worked when public support was still relatively low.

Maaten says, that the far right love this strategy because they can say that it’s proof of the existence of a ruling elite. “We represent you, the people, and look what happens. You want us to be in government but they will not let you do that,” the parties complain to their supporters.

Limited access to mainstream media suited them too. They could spread toxic content to social media without any accountability or consideration of facts. Given that young people especially get their news through TikTok, YouTube and Instagram, it helped to boost support. By naming liberals, left wing parties and immigrants as enemies, right wing operators have gone on full attack on perceived problems offering simple solutions and it has worked.

Once the parties started reaching 15%-20% support in elections, it became clear that there is a new political force in action.

In countries with proportional representation right wing parties often end up as coalition partners in government. Initially, it was thought outrageous, unworkable policies would soon expose them as incompetent rabble rouses, instead, being in government has made the parties more acceptable and mainstream. There are Europe wide co-operation networks between right wing parties and they have the same playbook now. Maaten says:

“Once you get them onboard, their aim is to undermine the institutions such as the judiciary or the parliament in general.”

“These people sit on the table with heads of government which decide policy for everybody. It’s very serious and we have to understand why this is happening. At the moment in the political centre we are clueless. Nobody knows what to do.”

As a response, traditional parties have hardened their language and copied ideas.

Maaten says that liberals have failed to provide a strong united opposition.



“In my opinion, we must be much more assertive in Europe and defend what we have accomplished based on liberal values. We have stopped inspiring in the political centre. It’s like we have nowhere to go as liberals in Western Europe. We have become the new conservatives. We are happy with society. Communism is gone, there is some kind of market economy everywhere, we want things to stay as they are. That may not in itself be wrong, but it doesn’t inspire anybody. We need to decide where we want to go”.

#### **Panel Discussion: The March to the Right in European Politics Royal Scots Club, Edinburgh – 6 September 2025**

Members and guests gathered at the Royal Scots Club on 6 September for a thought-provoking discussion on The March to the Right in European Politics – What is the Liberal Response? The event, organised by **Willie Wilson** and chaired by LI Scotland Convenor **Iain Smith**, brought together three distinguished speakers to explore the challenges facing liberal democracy across Europe.

**Jules Maaten**, former MEP and now Head of the EU Regional Office for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, opened the discussion with a clear-eyed look at the rise of right-wing and populist parties across Europe. He reflected on whether liberals have allowed politics to become too much of a “cosy club,” observing: “We’re not solving problems — we’re busier with political arguments and procedures.” He argued that liberals must be less hesitant in defending what Europe has achieved, warning of increasing risks to the “European way of life.” His call was for greater originality, confidence, and agenda-setting leadership.

**Gillian Gloyer**, a long-term election observer, drew on her experience across Central and Eastern Europe to illustrate how mistrust in democratic institutions is often deliberately fuelled. She pointed to the tactics of Poland’s Law and Justice (PiS) party, where targeted messaging and the support of sympathetic media — including influential Catholic radio networks — have amplified suspicion of “liberal elites” and civil society groups. She noted similar patterns emerging among other parties across Europe, each reinforcing narratives of grievance and distrust. Gillian emphasised that protecting democracy requires vigilance, transparency, and active efforts to rebuild public trust at home as well as abroad.

**Lord Jeremy Purvis of Tweed**, Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords, widened the lens to consider global implications. He highlighted how democratic backsliding in parts of Europe intersects with shifting geopolitical pressures, creating a more complex landscape for liberal values at home and abroad.

Across the panel, a clear message emerged: liberals must reclaim confidence, articulate a compelling and positive vision, and reinforce the institutions that safeguard democracy.

*Sally Robertson*

# Should Canada and the EU seek a merger?

by Sir Graham Watson

**In its first edition of 2025 the magazine The Economist published an opinion column under the headline ‘Why Canada should join the EU’. Its thrust was that shared values and a common interest in defending and promoting them are building a bridge across the north Atlantic.**

**Neither the EU or Canada can afford a trade war with the USA; nor can we single-handedly stand up for Chinese pressure**

In the eight years since the entry into force of the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), trade in goods between two partners has grown to over EUR 80bn (an increase of two thirds) and trade in services to over EUR 40bn (a rise of almost three quarters). 99% of all products traded have enjoyed tariff cuts, thus sustaining jobs, bringing down prices and widening choice for consumers. Businesses have been spared a whopping EUR 650 million each year in duties. Success stories include the trade in silver (up eight fold), clocks and watches (four fold), helicopters and aeroplanes (up by three and a half times). Petrochemicals trading has increased by a factor of 13 and, to sweeten the deal, the Europeans have doubled their imports of maple syrup.

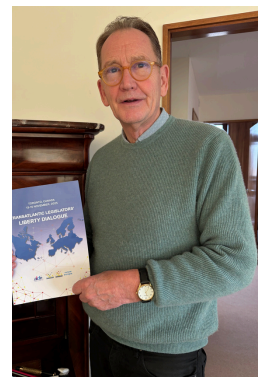
Neither the EU nor Canada can afford a trade war with the USA; nor can we single-handedly stand up to Chinese pressure such as restrictions on the exports of rare earths. Yet together we can reduce our trade dependency on other markets and uphold the principles of global rules-based trade to which other parts of the world still aspire.

Yet together we can reduce our trade dependency on other markets and uphold the principles of global rules-based trade to which other parts of the world still aspire. Similarly, the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement which accompanied CETA has grown to include discussions on providing greater opportunities for citizens, uniting our forces to fight crime, co-operating in the UNFCCC talks to combat climate change and working together on military security. We can de-risk our mutual security dependency on an unpredictable USA and provide Ukraine with the support it needs to resist Russian aggression by working more closely together.

The architects of CETA were both Liberals and both women: Chrystia Freeland, as Canada's trade minister and EU trade commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom are the people to whom we owe this success story. So it seems fitting that as another two powerful Liberal women – Canada's foreign minister Anita Anand and her EU counterpart Kaja Kallas – conclude their talks in Niagara on taking co-operation to the next level, Canadian Senator Art Eggleton and I brought together in Toronto ten legislators from each side of the north Atlantic to discuss how to build the parliamentary majorities to drive this co-operation forward.

Last month's Transatlantic Legislators' Liberty Dialogue, under the auspices of the Liberal International, is the first in what we hope will be a series of meetings to flesh out future enhanced co-operation. Ottawa and Brussels are exploring a new security and defence partnership and an economic security dialogue: a strategic partnership on raw materials, a digital partnership and a green alliance to save the planet all logically follow. We are confident that our dialogue at Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy has provided a petri-dish for ideas and an incubator for their development.

It might not be Canada seeking to join the EU, as The Economist speculated, but the development of both into a wider common area for citizens. The ocean which divides us may be presented by some as a barrier: for Liberals it is a shared resource. And in any case we share a common border:- albeit rather a short one and not as widely used as a crossing point – on Hans Island in the Arctic Circle.





# Ukraine fringe meeting in Glasgow: The Road to Peace



**The future of Ukraine matters to the whole of Europe and judging from the LI Scotland pre-Conference fringe meeting in Glasgow in October, there is a great deal of interest in discussing what it might be.**

The panellists, **Dr Laryza Zhdankina**, **Professor Peter Jackson** and **Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP**, all agreed that any peace agreement must respect the sovereignty and dignity of Ukraine and its people. Chaired by **Willie Wilson**, the discussions ranged from state building to European security in general.

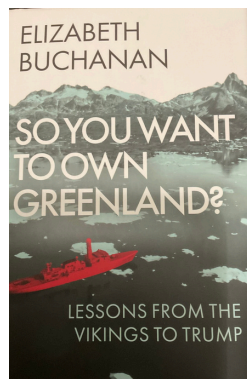
Alex Cole-Hamilton opened the evening at Kelvin Hall by telling his own recent experience of delivering ambulances to Ukraine and his impressions of a country at war. He described how unreal it feels when life goes on and it appears to be normal on the surface, but signs of war are everywhere from disinformation to air raid sirens.

Dr Laryza Zhdankina, Visiting Fellow at the School of Law in Glasgow University, said it's not enough to just aim to stop the war. She said that Ukrainians want a lasting peace and freedom, where it will be possible to have functioning state institutions, defend human rights and where Ukrainians can live without fear. This requires a major transformation and reform of state institutions. Zhdankina also talked about how Ukrainians are experiencing their own country from afar as refugees and the importance of national identity. Professor Peter Jackson, Chair of Global Security at Glasgow University put the Ukraine war into the context of European security, where Europe has had to find money and resources to defend Ukraine. He said that Russia will continue to be a threat even if peace is achieved. He noted that the integrity of liberal democracy is being questioned by Russia and now it's even under threat in the UK. He urged young people to get involved in defending democracy.

Thank you to LI Scotland member **Douglas Macdonald** for proposing and organising this very succesful and well attended meeting! (Photos from top: We had a full house at Kelvin Hall. Willie Wilson chaired the meeting. Professor Jackson, Dr Zhdankina and Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, Leader of Scottish Liberal Democrats.)



## On the Reading List: Lessons from Greenland



**If President Trump's demand for Greenland to be part of the US did anything good, it put the spotlight firmly on the growing strategic importance of the Arctic region. Trump is not the only one who has ever wanted to exploit this island of 56000 inhabitants, as Elizabeth Buchanan's book about the history of Greenland shows.**

Buchanan explores the history all the way from the Vikings to this day with an unusually easy flowing touch which makes entertaining reading.

She explains Greenland's complicated relationship with Denmark which is peppered with rivalry and colonialism but also partnership and co-operation. Independence would bring many challenges and self-governance has won the day so far but Greenland's future remains a dilemma. Buchanan is also challenging the current narrative about demand for Greenland's mineral wealth which is not easily monetised.

*Elizabeth Buchanan: So you want to Own Greenland? Hurst and Company, London. 2025. 203 pages.*

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### LI SCOTLAND MEMBERS RECOMMEND

**Ukraine-Russia War Talk, a podcast by Phillips O'Brien, St Andrews University**  
Much info you don't get elsewhere, says Sir Graham Watson.

[https://phillipsobrien.substack.com?utm\\_source=navbar&utm\\_medium=web](https://phillipsobrien.substack.com?utm_source=navbar&utm_medium=web)

**Kermode & Mayo's Take".**

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/kermode-mayos-take/id1616559297>

**It is primarily a film review podcast, but what I enjoy is the way the presenters approach things with a generally open, humane and outward-looking perspective, says Douglas Macdonald.**

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