

Use of a flag

One of the big visual differences when I was a visiting Minister in foreign lands was the usual universal presence of their national flags in the Ministerial offices and meeting rooms, with nothing similar at home. Here we had the odd battle about where and when the EU flag would be shown, and we had the relentless use of the EU flag on every project which had received however modest a sum of our money routed back to us via the EU. When Ministers asked that the display should also have the Union flag on it with acknowledgement of the usually larger sums of UK direct taxpayer money they were told that was against EU rules or given some other reason why the UK flag could not be shown.

The decision of today's Ministers to show the flag for their presentations and in their offices is merely bringing the UK into line with most other countries of the world. It also brings them into line with EU practice with universal use of the EU flag. It is curious that some in the BBC and their friends think it cause for merriment that government should be proud of our country and wish to display one of its known symbols. It is one thing to see a joke on twitter showing a picture of a man in a Union flag suit, with Union flag glasses and hat with the caption "Interview with a government Minister" but another to see mainstream BBC news programmes trying to become comedy shows at the expense of normal government practice to fly the flag. I have never heard them make fun of the many foreign interviewees who sit with their flag in their office, from US senators to Prime Ministers and Presidents of many countries.

It is all part of the strange mood of some in this country that seeks to denigrate who we are, what we stand for and what our ancestors did. Like all great countries that have contributed to human development there have been bad chapters to our story. There have been many more fine chapters, from saving Europe from dictators on several occasions to abolishing the slave trade to pioneering the industrial revolution. The fact that so many people wish to come to live and work in our country shows many abroad rate us highly. One of the most touching moments when I was a Minister came when I made an early visit to what had been Soviet eastern Europe. A lady stepped out when the official car with a small Union flag was stopped at lights to pay her respects to the flag. To her it symbolised freedom. She remembered the UK's role in liberating Europe from tyranny.