

I was born a British citizen, and want to die as one. But unless our gutless leaders stand up to Brussels, I won't be able to

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Every baby born in Britain may have the European Union flag stamped on its birth certificate within three years. Marriage and death certificates are likely to be similarly affected.

So says Eric Pickles, the Communities Secretary. He warns that the move is part of a plot by the European Commission in Brussels to brand people as European citizens 'from cradle to grave'.

Most depressing of all, Mr Pickles says there is absolutely nothing he can do to stop it. Parliament will have no say because the measure is being implemented under the Lisbon Treaty, signed by the last Labour government without a referendum, despite an earlier promise that there would be one.



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Unsurprisingly, the Commission denies the new certificates will be compulsory. But, as Mr Pickles points out, that was what it said when it was optional for EU countries to put the 12-star EU symbol on driving licences. Five years later it became mandatory, and in 2011 they were re-branded as ‘European driving licences’.

What is going on is so monstrous that one has to pinch oneself in case it’s a bad dream. Bit by bit, Brussels is presumptuously attempting to re-arrange the furniture of our everyday lives in order to make us feel more ‘European’ and less attached to the nation state in which we happen to live.

First, there was the unprepossessing European flag which, according to Mr Pickles, local councils and public institutions are under pressure from Brussels to fly at every opportunity.

Then came the anthem — the rousing final passage of Beethoven’s great ninth symphony — which has almost made me fall out of love with that stupendous piece of music. Half-inched by the EU, it is intended to boost our pride in being European.

In the Eighties, the Commission harmonised passports in the belief that, if we carried similar documents with Europe emblazoned on the front, we would see ourselves as citizens of a nascent European super state. The old British dark blue hardback design was junked, though ministers did manage to cling on to the royal crest.

And, of course, the very name of this burgeoning institution has been changed from the Common Market (quite loose) to the European Community (getting stronger) to the European Union (practically a country, like the United States).



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The plan for EU-style birth, marriage and death certificates is another development in this established trend. As usual, the justification is one of greater bureaucratic efficiency. With millions of people coming and going across borders, documents that look the same make life easier for officials.

But the real reason is that if people are born, marry and die under the aegis of the EU, they may come to regard it, not the Queen or Parliament, as the ultimate moral authority in their lives. This is social engineering on an epic scale.

That is why I was somewhat disappointed by the response of the normally very sensible Eric Pickles.

He should be congratulated for having so graphically highlighted a danger. Time and again over the years, British ministers have quietly and supinely acquiesced in Brussels' imperial stratagems.

But I wish that, having publicly identified the problem, Mr Pickles had not, figuratively speaking, shrugged his shoulders by saying there is nothing he can do to stop the EU juggernaut. This should be a red-line issue for the British Government.



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Other European countries tend to be far more self-assertive when their national self-interest is threatened by directives from the European Commission. In 1999, France ignored Brussels when ordered to import British beef after 'mad cow disease' had been brought under control.

France also swept aside the Commission's objections in 2010 when it unilaterally deported Roma to Romania and Bulgaria, both member states of the EU. Around the same time, Italian ministers looked the other way when told by Brussels to change rules on media ownership.

Successive British governments, by contrast, have usually been compliant in applying inconvenient or injurious directives that have never been approved by the British Parliament, and so are fundamentally undemocratic.

For example, the last Labour government accepted the European Working Time Directive, despite dire warnings from senior doctors that a maximum 48-hour week for junior doctors would cripple the NHS.

Labour also signed up to daft new EU rules about power generation. As a result, the Government is closing productive coal-fired power stations at the very time it is being warned of possible electricity black-outs as soon as the year after next. What kind of self-inflicted madness is this?

Most people have no notion of the scope of directives deluging out of Brussels that affect every area of our lives. Even so small a thing as the abolition of the old 192 directory enquiries system, and its replacement by a plethora of 118 numbers, was ordered by the Commission. Senior British civil servants characteristically denied this.

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Before these negotiations begin, wouldn't it be a good idea to stop handing over new powers to Brussels? The planned appropriation by the European Commission of birth, marriage and death certificates is no small matter

and, of course, they would not remain voluntary for long.

Part of me thinks that the tendency of Brussels to overreach itself by demanding more and more control over our lives will aid the Eurosceptic cause. The more people see how Eurocrats wish to regulate us into conformity and iron out our national differences, the greater the likelihood of a reaction, not just in this country but throughout Europe.



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The trouble is that one can't be sure when there will be a referendum on our membership of the EU, what form it will take or even whether it will ever happen. Labour's leader Ed Miliband has still made no commitment to consult the British people.

No, much better fight on the issue now. A government that allowed Brussels to stamp the EU flag on certificates would risk a backlash. That is why Eric Pickles has done us all a favour by his warning.

Very possibly he felt this was one battle he cannot fight, and win, by himself, and so is trying to recruit like-minded spirits in the Cabinet, Tory Party and Press to his cause. The British Government can prevail if it is determined to.

In the end it will be a test of how resolute David Cameron really is in wishing to resist the unceasing depredations of Brussels. His Lib Dem partners will say it is only a little thing and not worth fighting over, but most people know that is not true.

I want to die a British citizen, as I was born one and married as one, and I am certain that nine-tenths of my fellow countrymen feel exactly the same way. What the European Commission is proposing is nothing less than a further assault on our national identity.