

Dies Natalis 26 March 2019

Acceptance speech Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, honorary doctor

Dear Rector Magnificus and esteemed colleagues,

I am delighted to receive an honorary doctorate from this venerable university, which has one of the oldest law faculties in the Netherlands. It is also a pleasure to join all the scholars affiliated with the university, including Anna Maria van Schurman, who studied here as long ago as the 17th Century.

I am told I should say a little about my career, explaining how I came to this point. I was born and raised in Edinburgh, in another small country. But Scotland was never shy of forging links with the continent, and well before the EU came into being was sending scholars abroad, many to Dutch universities, including Utrecht. Perhaps this is where my interest in Europe and European law first arose, although my career has been spent largely in English universities, at King's College, Oxford, and now Queen Mary, which on a rough tally has 63 full-time faculty who are from, or with a degree from, continental Europe, including Utrecht. In 2002, I published *Constitutional Law of the European Union*, whose title was considered audacious, because some people thought the EU incapable of anything like a constitutional law. (And many still don't). But, if so, the EU is in good company perhaps, because the UK has no (formal) constitution either.

I have also spent much of my career working on human rights, which everyone now believes to be a central part of any democratic regime, and I will talk about them more with your students tomorrow. For today, all I will say is that it is depressing that human rights are constantly under threat, including in the EU, certainly in the UK.

I could not conclude without remarking on a final irony. I am receiving this honour at least in part for my work on European law (I assume). Yet many in Britain now repudiate the EU and European law, for reasons that seem to me unintelligible. My grandfather was killed fighting in the first world war. That to me more than justifies the need for a European union. Have people forgotten Europe's bloody past? And yet there is also a paradox. Britain has in many ways never felt more European. So many of us in Britain have links with continental Europe, including my own family, who are here today. Brexit, whether it takes place or not, will not end these connections, which have flourished throughout history. And as I notice, Utrecht Law Faculty offers no less than 6 masters degrees taught in English, so I hope that many British students will study in Utrecht and continue those connections.

So I again thank Utrecht University for this Honorary Doctorate. I believe both European and human rights law bridge divides and promote transnational collaborations, so it is a very great honour to receive such a prestigious recognition.