

Winning the EU referendum

Ken Worthy

The great fear of Eurosceptics is that we would lose an In/Out referendum, because of voters' fear of the unknown, plus dire warnings from big business, politicians and the media of the risks of loss of trade and jobs. However we could win a referendum on whether to be a member of the EU or of EFTA. EFTA is inside the single market (the EEA), so there would be no threat to trade or jobs. Those against leaving would be deprived of their most powerful arguments.

Joining EFTA would give us most of the benefits of leaving completely:

- * Keep our access to the single market, but not the common external tariff.
- * Let us negotiate our own trade deals, with EFTA or independently.
- * Allow us to restrict immigration, by using Safeguard Measures provided for in the EEA Agreement.
- * Enable us to reject future steps towards ever-closer union to protect the Euro.
- * Provide a powerful negotiating block for future relations with the EU.
- * Provide other countries with an alternative to "ever-closer union" and the Euro.
- * Be a stepping stone to full independence at a later stage.

The fear of most Eurosceptics is that even if we succeeded in getting an In/Out referendum, we would lose. People don't know what leaving the EU involves. Fear of the unknown would be reinforced by propaganda from big business, politicians and the media that leaving would lead to a disastrous loss of trade and jobs. The

"three million jobs at risk" scare, however puerile, would be paraded again and again. In opinion polls, the main reason given for staying in the EU is to protect our trade. It is this fear that would lose us a referendum. To win, we need to eliminate the fear.

A Different Question EU or EFTA?

The Conservatives need to clarify what they would do if the deal offered by the EU is not acceptable. Their solution should be to leave the EU and join EFTA. EFTA is what we thought we were joining - a free trade agreement without all the supra-national ambitions, costs and controls. The In/Out question would effectively be replaced by "would you prefer to be in the EU or EFTA?". In/Out is a scary choice for voters. The choice between membership of the EU or EFTA is much less scary:

* The key point is that EFTA has access to the single market, and therefore involves no risk of loss of trade and jobs. The opposition of big business would be much reduced, and their claims much less credible. The claim of 3 million jobs at risk would collapse. The case against change would be deprived of its strongest argument.

* EFTA is a known and established institution. We were founder members. The debate could be based on facts about EFTA and how it actually works, not fears of the unknown. EFTA states are richer than EU states and currently average 4% unemployment. Polls show 70% would support our being

members of EFTA.

Advantages of EFTA/EEA

EFTA countries are members of the EEA (European Economic Area) - ie the single market. They:

- * Have access to the single market, but don't apply the common external tariff - we could reduce tariffs (eg on raw materials, components & food) to suit our economy.
- * Can negotiate their own trade treaties - EFTA has agreements with over 20 countries, including Canada, Singapore, Mexico, Chile, Turkey, South Africa and South Korea. They are negotiating an agreement with India, which the EU has given up on. EFTA tends to negotiate as one, but members have the right to negotiate their own treaties.
- * Accept most EU regulations (three-quarters in practice so far), but are not bound to accept all of them. Crucially, EFTA polices its own rules, not the European Court.
- * Are outside the CAP and control their own fisheries, oil and gas industries, and justice systems.

The EEA is based on EU rules as they were in 1992, plus changes accepted by EFTA since then. Members can reject new EU rules, including any future moves towards economic union to save the Euro. Technically, EFTA members even can reject the free movement of people and capital. For example:

- * Iceland imposed capital controls and resisted EU pressure to bail out EU

Continued on page 2

INSIDE: EP elections result ignored by Westminster p 2 – Book Review "The Trouble with Europe" p 3 - EU gains more influence p 3 – Propaganda begins p 3 – Winning the EU referendum p 4 – Letters p 6

Winning the EU referendum

Continued from page 1

citizens.

* Norway does not intend to implement EU regulations on its oil and gas industry, proposed in 2011, whereas Britain might have to, under QMV.

* The EFTA Secretariat has identified over 1200 EU acts designated by the EU as "EEA relevant" but not adopted by EFTA.

* The EEA Agreement includes "Safeguard Measures" which allow the parties to take unilateral action if serious difficulties arise. UK could use this to avoid the consequences of unrestricted immigration unacceptable to its people. A reciprocal agreement could allow those already in place to stay.

* Switzerland said in Feb 14 that it will restrict immigration in 3 years time. Not being a member of the EEA, it relies on bilateral treaties for access to the single market. In retaliation, the EU has ended Swiss access to some projects and agreements, but have not yet clarified whether they will try to restrict Swiss access to the single market, which would also involve restricting EU access to the Swiss market.

The UK joining would strengthen EFTA in negotiations with the EU. They could make much greater use of their exemptions from EU law, the potential of Safeguard Measures, and

their negotiating power on future regulations. Iceland and Norway are not fully satisfied with the EEA agreement, but are not powerful enough to force the EU to renegotiate. The UK could also support Switzerland in resisting any EU "punishment" for restricting immigration.

Joining EFTA would also overcome the major practical problem of timescale and workload - how to bring into effect hundreds of replacement trade agreements when we leave, so that trade is not affected.

An enlarged EFTA would be a demonstrably more successful block than the EU. Denmark and others would be likely to follow us into EFTA, to escape the stagnation of the Eurozone. By providing an alternative, it could destroy the EU.

Arguments Against

The opposition would claim that:

* EFTA has to obey all the rules without a say in what they are. But they don't have to adopt them all - eg Norway adopted 3,000 Euro-laws in 2002-5, compared with 18,000 adopted by Britain in the same period.

* The EU would somehow punish us for leaving. But we are their biggest customer, buying more from them than the US and Japan together. EU businesses would not want to lose this market.

* We would have no influence outside the EU. On the contrary, EFTA countries have their own foreign policies and represent themselves on international bodies. They don't have to adopt a compromise EU position. They have more influence than they would as small members of the EU.

* We would have no influence in the EU. We would have less, certainly, but they would have much less influence over us, which is the whole point. We don't want to tell them what to do.

A Staging Post to Full Independence?

The Single Market has its disadvantages. It can be seen as an equal handicapping of all EEA countries with a common burden of excessive regulation. If in the longer term we came to see the disadvantages as outweighing the advantages, we could leave EFTA. We would take the time needed to prepare for our exit and would have the power to set up the required trade treaties in advance. We would find EFTA easier to leave than the EU, and would be more confident about doing so.

Given the choice of being in EFTA or the EU, there is little doubt that voters would choose EFTA. It is the free trade agreement we thought that we were joining - one without all the supra-national burdens and ambitions. We could win that referendum.

EP election results ignored by Westminster

Despite the results of the European Parliamentary Elections showing that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had gained MEPs and increased their share of the vote, the Westminster MPs all carried on with their promotion of the EU.

The Westminster MPs of all parties pretended that this was a protest vote against politicians generally and that the UKIP share of the vote was just about some minor problem regarding immigration.

Unfortunately, the media and many UKIP representatives responded by just talking about immigration and not discussing the costs involved and the loss of sovereignty imposed by the UK's continued membership of the EU.

The public did not vote UKIP just about immigration, it was just as much about the huge financial contribution the UK makes to the EU, and the increasing costs created by the rules and regulation imposed by the EU on the businesses and citizens.

Meanwhile, Angela Merkel and the German led EU machine will continue with the push for more EU powers and regulation to take control of the UK's successful service sector, until it is lost to Frankfurt or Paris all in the name of EU harmonisation.

Democracy and independence have already been given up, the citizens can see this but the leaders of the Conservatives and Labour cannot or do not want to admit it. While the Lib-Dems want more EU, not less.