

# Brexit is good news – Conservative Home article

As a young man I voted in the 1975 referendum on staying in the European Community. I read the Treaty of Rome which bound us and realised it set out a long journey to European Union. The main political parties told me to vote to stay in something they called the Common market. This lovely myth was a free market, with no damage to our ability to make our own laws and spend our own money. I did not believe them and voted to leave. I found it difficult to grasp how they could so misinterpret the Treaty we had signed.

It was a blow when I heard the result. As a good democrat I congratulated the winners and did my best to get behind their winning vision. I had no wish to undermine their action which I had opposed. I resolved to help the winners implement their vision of keeping the European Community to just a common market, or more likely helping opt us out of all the obvious other integration tasks it was inevitable the EEC/EU would wish to advance. The Yes campaign had strenuously denied the European foreign policies and military task forces, European migration and crime policies, European taxation and much else that was to evolve.

I was in this spirit for twenty years, never challenging the decision to stay in. I was appointed Single market Minister. That was the worst job I had to do in government and showed me from the inside just how far the EC and its single market had deviated from the common market vision of 1975. Using the market as cover the EC bombarded us with laws over wide ranging topics from the environment to taxation, from health and safety to employment. They sought to lay down in law how businesses in different sectors should do their jobs. The Franco-German axis had undue weight with the Commission, seeking to embed the business models of their main companies into EC law. It was a brilliant power grab. It was anti enterprise and innovation, creating trade barriers without and barriers to innovators and small business from within. My job was the negative one of seeking to delay, defer or amend the worst proposals. I went hoarse explaining a common market just needed the rule that any product deemed to be of merchandisable quality in one member state could be sold in another. With clear labels consumers could make their own choices,

The net result of single market excess law making has been to give a huge competitive boost to the USA where companies have not faced the same controls and legal strictures. The digital revolution which has changed lives and been powered by smartphones, downloads, social media and the web has been dominated by the US. Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Netflix, Nvidia and the rest are US titans. There is no single large global digital company from a European base. this is such a dominant part of a modern economy.

When the EC moved to being the European Union and wanted to press on with a single currency I wrote the books and some of the articles to keep the pound.

It was obvious most UK voters understood surrendering our currency would end any pretence of effective self government. Polls always showed strong majorities against. It was also clear that many MPs and top civil servants wanted to join the Euro or would go along with it. I fought battles within the Conservative Party to firm up our view that the UK should keep its own currency. We persuaded John Major to secure the all important opt out from joining but then had to battle to make sure no Conservative leader flirted with joining nonetheless.

As the war over the Treaty of Maastricht developed it became clearer to more people the EU was not mainly about trade and a market. It was about building an integrated Union with a flag, a Parliament, a Supreme Court, extensive law codes, EU taxes and debts, with common policies across all fields. It became obvious to more Conservatives that we needed a new referendum. The new question would not be to reverse the idea of the common market but to test out the reality that the evolving Union was so much more than a market, and its market was not free. Belonging to its market meant accepting many clumsy laws, paying a large tax to be in it, and putting up with many restrictions on internal and external trade.

The UK's predictable and tragic ejection from the European Exchange Mechanism and the nasty recession that caused led to the exile of Conservatives from office for 13 years. In opposition the party wisely opposed the further integration of the Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties. Under our democracy it was unacceptable for a new government to get into power unable to govern in many ways owing to the surrender of big powers to the EU by the outgoing government with Opposition support. I and a few other MPs campaigned for a referendum. David Cameron's good decision to promise one in the 2015 Manifesto helped us win a majority to govern that year for the first time since 1992.

I am so pleased the UK electors voted to take back control in 2016. Everyday since I rejoice that we can now shape our future again. So far government has been too cautious, sticking to failed EU laws and policies. Too many MPs and civil servants have fought to prevent the UK altering things to help us succeed, seeking to keep us tied to the EU whatever the costs. In a future piece I will set out how we can use our freedoms more. It is high time we had some Brexit wins. The USA need not always build the main global business successes. We could narrow the gap in income per head if we tried, now we are free to do so. It will take lower and fewer taxes and better laws to do so.

Sent from my iPad