

German questions

Occasionally I am invited to appear on German television. I usually agree, as I find I learn more about current German attitudes from the bias or drift of the questions.

This week I was surprised that many of the questions still seemed to be rooted in the idea that the UK was somehow going to remain part of their EU plans. In preparation I was asked what it was I disliked about the EU. Realising this would lead to a line of questions that either led them to tell me I had interpreted the EU wrongly, or to propositions that if we stayed in these disagreeable features could be toned down or changed, I gave my answer. "Everything" I said. I wanted to move us on to the more productive issues of what relationship will an independent UK have with Germany and the EU.

Instead they pressed the issue. What in particular was annoying, they asked. I clarified by saying it was the EU's ability to make our laws and tell us what to do that we rejected. There were various individual cases that the UK was particularly unhappy about, but it was the general power, the ability to force more bad laws and policies on us in the future that led to the decision to leave. They seemed to think if there was some fudge or fix on migration the UK would be happy. They still have not grasped the meaning or significance of the winning phrase of the campaign, we want to take back control.

It made me think how absurd this whole so called negotiation the EU wants us to have about leaving is. The Treaty gives us an absolute right to leave. It imposes no additional bill or other requirements. All we had to do was send a letter and give them two years notice, which we have done. That notice will cost us more than £20bn and we accept that. It is not an invitation to negotiate over which of their laws and financial demands we need to carry on with in the future.

IN the interview proper the German presenter had got it, and allowed me to make clear that as far as the UK is concerned we are leaving. The UK is very willing to talk about our future relationship, and has made a generous offer of continuing free trade without tariffs. It is up to the EU to decide whether they want that or wish instead to impose what barriers they can on their trade with us under WTO rules. Clearly this all comes as news to many in Germany, who still see us a fellow paymaster of the EU under its control.