

German views of the EU and Brexit

On Wednesday morning the Today programme had the good idea of going to Germany to find out what they are thinking about the EU and Brexit. A few patsy interviews later we were little the wiser. There was no cross examination of how Germany is changing, with the Eurosceptic AfD now the official Opposition and the CSU moving sharply in an anti migrant direction. There was no proper examination of what the German government will now do post Brexit in response to Macron's wish to push ahead with political Union and a common budget. There was no discussion at all about the 900 billion Euros Germany is lending the weaker members of the zone at zero interest through the ECB. I would like to have heard what Germany thinks about the pace and style of more integration, how they wish to change the budget after our departure and above all how they will tackle the need for more transfers around the Euro area to help the struggling members with high unemployment.

Instead the BBC was keen to get a few German interviewees to tell the UK what we should expect from Brexit, and keen to play up the latest approach of some senior Germans that it is such a pity the UK is leaving so they should now respond more positively to Mr Cameron's requests for renegotiation! I find it bizarre that some intelligent Germans seem to think that maybe a concession or two on freedom of movement, and some opt out or emergency brake on benefit rules will mean the UK then changes its mind and stays in. They had their chance to keep us in by being positive about the Cameron renegotiation. Many of us thought Mr Cameron asked for too little, and clearly got a lot less even than he dared ask for. Offering more of the too little he wanted is not going to change anything. The BBC seemed pleased that maybe there will be an offer of tariff free trade after all, as if that was some surprise. Of course Germany wants tariff free trade in goods, given her huge surplus. Whether the EU as a whole can make a sensible offer on trade remains to be seen. Germany should work on the Commission. The BBC was also keen to highlight those Germans who say that the Transition period cannot be taken for granted as they sought to help Germany squeeze more concessions from the UK to secure a Transition many of us do not want.

It was predictable to hear the Germans say that in the case of us leaving the customs union and single market, as we have said we will do, there was scope to keep us in after all despite early EU rhetoric that of course you cannot be in them if you are out of the EU. Again that boat has sailed. Leave voters voted in the knowledge we would be leaving the single market and customs union, and the EU confirmed the logic of that in all their comments. It was also amusing to learn that maybe passports should be available for financial services, as of course German companies would like them into London, when the UK had ruled them out! It just goes to show that if the UK says No firmly on items Germany is quite keen to make an offer we might still refuse.