

Reply to President Macron

Dear President Macron

Thank you for your letter addressed to the UK on the occasion of our departure from the EU. My country looks forward to welcoming you personally to the UK for your next visit, and wishes to have friendly relations with you as our neighbouring state as with the rest of the EU.

As an independent nation we support free trade, democracy and peace and will work to promote all three with our allies and friends. We regard the question of membership of the EU as something for the peoples and governments of each country to decide without external interference. We will work closely with fellow European countries whether non members like Norway and Switzerland or members like France and Germany on issues where we have a common interest or viewpoint.

I was disappointed to see that you have not understood why so many people in the UK voted to leave the EU in the first place and why so many voted in the two subsequent General elections for parties that wished to see Brexit through. You state that you need a "sovereign and democratic Europe whose strength will make our continent strong". You may well think the EU needs to have a stronger central government which is more efficient and effective at doing things. Your task is to explain that vision of greater EU integration and power both to the EU itself where the Germans are sometimes more reluctant than you going forward, and to your own voters who do not all share that vision. I can assure you that the pro Brexit majority in the UK was fundamentally opposed to more EU political integration, and wanted powers back from the EU for the UK which the EU decided not to offer. As a bare minimum we wanted control over our taxes, benefits and borders, areas where UK governments had previously falsely assured us we would retain a veto.

It is not now for the UK to tell the EU what level of political or economic integration is appropriate because we are no longer members with vote and voice. We wish you all well in coming to a happy outcome. I note making a success of a single currency usually requires substantially more political, budgetary and economic integration than the EU has so far achieved. It usually needs what the Germans somewhat disparagingly call a "transfer union". When I with others ran a successful campaign to persuade the UK not to join the Euro it was obvious the UK needed a different relationship with the EU, whilst the EU proceeded on the false assumption that it was only a matter of time before the UK gave in and joined the currency.

You state that UK access to the single market will depend on the "degree to which EU rules are accepted". The UK is leaving so we can make our own laws. The government has made clear we seek a Free Trade Agreement if there is a mutually beneficial one that is better than trading with each other on best or favoured nation WTO terms. Japan and Canada have

good FTAs with the EU that do not require accepting EU legislative supremacy. You should also remember that the EU seeks preferential access to the UK market, which it has enjoyed for many years. Our mutual trade account is dominated by EU exports, not by UK exports. We are happy to offer continued tariff free and relatively barrier free entry to the UK in return for similar access to the EU despite the big imbalance in trade in the EU's favour.

Brexit voters voted to leave the single market and customs union and do not share your rosy view of these devices. Many think the EU sees the UK as a Treasure island, to take our money and to sell us many goods on terms denied the rest of the world. We do not think the single market was created by UK Ministers. As the UK's single market Minister in the crucial period prior to the 1992 so called completion of the single market I remember fighting many battles at the time trying to make the single market less of an excuse for a power grab with a big build up in bureaucracy over business. Some of the large companies who now support EU rules in those days wanted me to argue against many of them or to water them down on the grounds that they made things dearer but not better and were hostile to innovation. .

I watched sadly our first ten years of membership of the EEC. As I predicted at the time, the shock of removing all tariffs on goods where Germany and to a lesser extent France and Italy had a comparative advantage over us, without removing barriers to a wide range of services where the UK had an advantage resulted in a big increase in our trade deficit with the EU which continued throughout our membership. More importantly it led to a halving of our car output, to a large reduction in our steel output, to the closure of many foundries and textile mills. No wonder I and many like me developed or confirmed a negative view of the EEC/EU. This was made far worse by the disaster of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism inflicted on us by the EU and the governing elite in the UK.

So please understand we want to be friends with the EU and with its individual member states. We are happy to trade freely with you even though it helps EU exporters more than our own. We see no need to sacrifice further or pay more for our future relationship. Your letter implies the EU has learned nothing and still does not understand why we left. We left to be an independent country. You cannot drag us back under EU control because it suits the EU.

You mention Winston Churchill. He did indeed want a more integrated Europe but never thought the UK would be part of it. He wrote his History of the English speaking peoples to set out his view that the UK needed closer ties with the USA and other Countries in his history.

With every good wish

John Redwood