

My speech during the debate on Legislating for the Withdrawal Agreement, 11 September 2018

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The British people voted, by a large majority of over 1.25 million votes, to leave the European Union. We had all been told, by means of leaflets sent to our homes by the then Government, that this was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to vote on this—not a series of votes until people got the answer they liked—and that we, the people, would make the decision. It was a very clear issue. The leave voters I met, and I met a good number of leave voters, took it very seriously. They understood the arguments, they considered them and they meant their vote. I do find it most curious that some Members of Parliament are still saying that it was not clear that we voted to leave the single market and the customs union. One of the very few things that the two official campaigns agreed on was that point. Remain said that we would obviously have to leave the single market and customs union—remainers regarded it as a kind of threat—and leave said that we would want to leave the single market and customs union, as well as having to, because we saw it as an opportunity. So there was happy agreement and everybody voted accordingly.

I was a very strong supporter of this Government because they were elected, in the recent general election, on a ticket of getting on with implementing Brexit. That was pretty popular around the country. The Conservatives got a much higher percentage of the popular vote than in all the previous elections since Margaret Thatcher. We did not get as many seats as we would have liked because there were interesting surges in the popularity of the Labour party, which also fought the election on getting on with implementing Brexit. The bit of the Labour manifesto I most enjoyed was the rather long piece in it about how Labour wanted an independent trade policy. It was not in every respect the policy that I would have designed, but Labour made it crystal clear that it wanted a completely independent trade policy and that would of course be totally incompatible with staying in a single market and a customs union.

I was very happy with the Lancaster House speech, which I thought was beautifully crafted. It set out exactly the vision that most leave voters and many moderate remain voters who accepted the democratic verdict of the people could buy into.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East & Saddleworth) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman said that he appreciated the Lancaster House speech and that everybody who voted to leave did, too, but how does he know that?

John Redwood: From conversations, watching opinion polls and listening to the national conversation. I do not know about the hon. Lady, but I take my politics seriously and I regard it as my job to listen, to read, to understand and to consult colleagues. I find that coming into the Chamber is

quite a good way of judging the mood because sometimes Members of Parliament, even those on the Labour Benches, know the mood in their constituencies.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend remind the hon. Lady and the House that a pamphlet was put out by the Government during the referendum campaign that explicitly said, "This decision will be yours"? There was no question of its being decided by Members of Parliament. We operate by a system of parliamentary government, not government by Parliament.

John Redwood: Indeed, but let us press on.

My worry is about the Chequers proposal—and it is only a proposal; it is not a deal or an agreement—which was set out in the future relationship White Paper, and the consequent White Paper about how such an agreement, were one to arise, would be handled and implemented by this Parliament. My worry, and I think it is the worry of many leave voters and some remain voters, is that, having voted to get rid of treaty law—to dismiss the European Union treaty because we had not enjoyed living under its tentacles—the Government now suggest we need another two European treaties to replace the one that we are getting rid of. We are mightily suspicious of treaty law. Why are we so suspicious of it? Because the original treaty, the treaty of Rome, masqueraded as a free trade agreement, which is how it was sold to the British people in the long-distant 1975 referendum, but by accretion and development, over which the British people had no control, it changed—through Nice, Amsterdam, Maastricht and Lisbon—into a massive panoply of laws and controls and completely changed our constitutional structure, without the people ever having a proper vote on that process until the most recent referendum.

We know from our experience here that this became what I call a puppet Parliament. In dozens and dozens of crucial areas where we might like to legislate, we had no power to legislate independently of the European Union whatsoever. In all those massive areas—not just trade and business, but the environment, social policy, employment policy and even foreign affairs—we had to legislate in the way the European Union laid down. Quite often, many Members of Parliament and many members of the public disagreed with that way. Quite often, it was an area where the Government had either lost a vote or did not bother to hold one because they knew they were going to lose as they were in disagreement with other member states. It was that above all else that the British public rejected in the historic vote in 2016. They said to Members of Parliament, "Collectively, you often make a mess, we don't always approve of you and we are very critical of you, but you are our MPs" and the joy the public have is that they can fire us if we really annoy them or we get it wrong, whereas the European Union often strongly annoys them and gets it wrong and there is absolutely no one they can, directly or indirectly, have fired because it is a system that the UK cannot control and has to receive. We are, therefore, very suspicious of the idea of more treaty law.

One of the things that makes this debate very difficult for a neutral observer to come to a sensible view on is the abuse of language and the scare stories that seem to characterise most of what passes for debate on these

important issues. I do not for one moment believe that there is a cliff edge and I do not for one moment believe that we would leave the European Union with no agreements. There will be lots of agreements. We have always had lots of agreements: there are lots of business-to-business agreements, business-to-individuals agreements, business-to-Government agreements and even Government-to-Government agreements. Once we have left the European Union properly, I am sure that there will be a lot of diplomacy, discussion and joint action, but we want it to be bilateral and based on the merits of the case as we proceed each time. We do not wish it to be multilateral through the EU, where the EU has special legal powers that mean that it has duress over us or can prevent us from having a weighted dialogue with the EU and reaching an agreement if we wish and not if we do not.

The structure of what the Government are now proposing is quite alarming. The EU withdrawal agreement would take the form of an international treaty, which would of course need full ratification by Parliament in the way that has been laid out. However, if it was agreed with the EU and then subsequently ratified by this Parliament, we would be back in the position where European law had more significance and for the whole of the transition period we would of course be completely back under the control of the European Union. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has pointed out, we would be even more vulnerable than we are today because the EU could legislate in our absence. At least we can see them annoying us at the moment around the same table, whereas we would be in the position where they could simply do it without consulting us or taking into account our views.

Therefore, that is not a good idea, but even worse is the proposed legal form of the so-called future partnership agreement. The UK Government call it a partnership agreement, but I think what the EU proposes, and would call it, is an EU association agreement. Such agreements are normally very comprehensive, and we can see exactly what they look like when we read the one for Turkey or for Ukraine. They have been designed by the EU to lock in countries that would like to become members but are not yet fully compliant with all its legal requirements, standards and so forth. They are used to drag those countries gradually into compliance—usually willingly, because they want to join.

We want something completely different. We want agreements on how to proceed in various areas, but we are going in the other direction. We do not want an agreement that drags us into closer compliance; we want the freedom and flexibility to have our own trade policy, our own fishing policy and our own business policy as time evolves. I am very worried that an association agreement model, rather than allowing that, would reintroduce the powers of the European Court, over which we will obviously have no control, and we would again be under strict control in a number of wide-ranging areas from which the British people wish us to liberate themselves.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): In the right hon. Gentleman's vision of the future, how does he see the nature of the devolved Governments here? There was clearly a very different relationship before we went into the EU. What influence does he see them having on the trade deals that the Government seek?

John Redwood: In the model that I am describing, we would get much more power back and we would keep it, and that would then be shared with the devolved Administrations, so they too would be winners. That settlement will be sorted out in the usual democratic way in a unitary country that has recently had a very important democratic event. The Scottish people decided by a decent margin in a referendum that they wished to stay in the United Kingdom, so their way of influencing the trade deals will be through this Parliament. Had they chosen to leave the United Kingdom, they would be having their own trade deals—or more likely they would be having the EU's trade deals, because the Scottish National party does not seem to want an independent Scotland; they want a Scotland that is dependent on the EU, rather than a very important partner in the United Kingdom enterprise.

My other worry about the two prospective treaties that the Government are mulling over is conditionality. The Government have told us that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and I fully approve of that. They also seem to understand that, unless they are prepared to say to the European Union, "We will leave without signing the withdrawal agreement," they have no negotiating position. We now know that the Government are quickly preparing to be able to leave without signing a withdrawal agreement. I think that that would be a very attractive option for many leave voters because the withdrawal agreement itself is mainly about the United Kingdom paying an extremely large bill. The Government are saying, "Yes, but you need to look at the whole package. You need to see what is in the future partnership"—the association agreement treaty to come, because they think that might persuade Parliament and people to accept the rather unpalatable withdrawal proposal. The Government's problem, as we have just heard from the Opposition, is that there will not be a majority in this House to put through the current kind of withdrawal proposals the Government have without a very clear, bold and good-looking association agreement/future partnership and we might be looking only at rather vague heads of terms. I suggest that the Government need to introduce rather stronger conditionality than they have done so far in their negotiations. They need to make it crystal clear that there is no £39 billion unless something really impressive is available.

I do not know about the Government—I sometimes worry about how they might go shopping—but when I go shopping I do not go into a shop, put £39 down on the counter and say, very politely, "By the way, I have £39 there for you, which I thought you might like. Do you have something that I might like so that I do not leave the shop as a loser?" It seems to me that that is what the Government did. They put down £39 billion—they have rather more money than I have, lucky them; some of it is money that they took from me, actually—on the counter and said, "By the way, EU, we have these dreadful Eurosceptics back home who want value for money, so it would be quite nice if you could offer us something that might be suitable for us."

When I look at what the EU has in its shop, I am afraid, oh Government, that I do not see anything that I would pay £39 billion for. Yes, I would like a free trade deal, which I think would be a perfectly good answer in the current situation, but I do not remember Canada paying anything for its free trade deal. A Canada deal would be just fine, with a few extra knobs and

whistles—we start from complete compliance with the EU, so it will be easy to have a few extra knobs and whistles—but I do not think that is the kind of thing I would pay £39 billion for. Indeed, the tariff saving would be a small fraction of £39 billion, so it would not make a lot of sense financially. The Government, therefore, have a bit of work to do to persuade friendly, reasonable people like me that the two treaties they have in mind represent a good deal for the British people.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman's point about the divorce payment. Is he making the case that Nigel Farage should be deprived of his pension pot?

John Redwood: I am not suggesting that at all. That gentleman's pension pot is a liability of the European Union. They entered into it, so I think it is something that they need to sort out. I do not think that the European Union should be the kind of body that stops people getting their pensions. I do not remember when we joined the European Union being given a big pot of money to reflect all the liabilities we inherited, so it is a bit difficult to understand why the reverse has to happen when we leave and we have to pay for the others. We simply were not given a whole load of money at the beginning to reflect the fact that we were going to have to pick up some of the pensions of civil servants who had been working in the EU before we arrived.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman thinks that we went into the European Union on the basis of a referendum in which people did not understand the question but we are not allowed to use that argument now. Is it not the case that when new members join the European Union, they become liable for liabilities that occur only after they join? In the same way, if any member is daft enough to leave, they are liable only for those liabilities that occurred before they left.

John Redwood: No, I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. I think that he will find that we were responsible for the existing pension liabilities jointly and severally with the other members. We cannot really complain about that; we were joining the club, so we had to help pay the club bills. When we leave the club, the remaining members pay the bills—it is a fairly straightforward operation.

Dr Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I would have thought that when someone leaves the bar in the golf club, they pay their tab before they go. That is what the £39 billion is; it is not shopping for a trade deal. If the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that no deal is better, so as not to pay the £39 billion, I would be interested to hear what he thinks will happen to the EU citizens who have settled here and to British citizens who have settled in Europe, because they are also part of the withdrawal agreement.

John Redwood: I have always said that someone should pay for the drinks they have just ordered in the bar while still a club member, and once they have ceased to be a club member they cannot order drinks anyway, so there is no problem. I do not think that the hon. Lady has really got that one. As for EU citizens, I am very keen that we reinforce the Prime Minister's assurances. I have always thought that if we do the right thing by its citizens, it will

end up doing the right thing by ours. It is very important that we do not forget that our citizens have rights and need support as well, but I do not believe that the EU is as nasty as some remain voters seem to believe. I do not believe that this group of democratic nations would start evicting people from their countries after they had settled there legally under its rules. I hope that the hon. Lady is not suggesting that. If she is, why does she wish to belong to the kind of organisation that throws people out when they are legally entitled to be there?

Dr Whitford: It was the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues sitting on the same Benches who talked about EU citizens as bargaining chips and playing cards. One of them stated in the newspapers only recently that EU citizens would not be allowed to stay—someone not very far away from him at all.

John Redwood: I suggest that the hon. Lady addresses those remarks to whoever she thinks said that, but I did not.

Mr Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I was asked a different question, which was about the rights of EU migrants who come after we have left. I have always thought that those who are here before we leave should maintain full rights.

John Redwood: Indeed. I would not have expected anything else. I think that it is always better if people speak for themselves.

I am very worried by this drift. I am also worried by this whole so-called implementation period or transitional period. It is clearly not an implementation period, because there is nothing to implement as of today. Even if there is a moderately detailed political agreement, it will not be something we can go off and implement. I have become very nervous about the idea that we need another 21 months of uncertainty. I have heard a lot from remain about the dangers of uncertainty. I can see that going on for too long with arguments about our future is not terribly helpful. I think 33 months is probably quite long enough to have a good old argument and see whether we can get a decent set of agreements from the EU or not. I remain to be persuaded that there is something our talented Ministers can achieve in negotiations on 1 April next year, to pluck a date out of the air with no particular significance about it being April fools' day. What is it that could be agreed on April fools' day next year that could not be agreed now or in December? We still have seven negotiating months left. We have already had two years or more of negotiations. I would say that that was a fair enough test. I would also take the view that if there is not something at the end of 33 months that we like, then we should just say, "Fine, it is not to be. We will go off and do bilaterals on a regular basis on the things that are of mutual interest." I suspect we would get along just fine.

That is, of course, how the 160 other countries around the world get on with the EU. They do not have a special trade arrangement. They are certainly not bound by EU treaties in most cases. There are those who are terribly worried about the fate of the trade deals the EU has with 60-odd countries. I can reassure them that I still have not heard a single one of those countries say they wish to lose that trade deal with the UK. Of course, in law it novates

to both the UK and the rest of the EU, but it needs to be agreed with the other party to the agreement. I do not know of any country that does not want to allow us to novate. Of course, some say we could improve it and make it better—why not? It is a good idea to have a look at it, but until I am told of a country that has actually ruled out taking on one of these trade deals I think they are there for us to continue to enjoy.

What is more important is that if we got on and left, we could sign trade deals and implement them from April next year. There are a number of countries friendly to us who would like early trade deals. There are off-the-shelf trade deals that they might be interested in developing, which they have developed with others, that would get us off to a good start. I do not like the provision in the White Paper—I think perhaps the Minister did not quite grasp it—that says, as I understand it, for the 21 months they are proposing for transition we are not allowed to implement a trade deal with anybody else. I think we could discuss them and get them ready for signing—that kind of thing—but they could be brought into effect. I think it would be rather nice to get on with it and bring things into effect.

There are plenty of other things I would like to talk about, but there are many others who would like to join in. Let me sum up by saying that my worry about the EU withdrawal proposal is that I do not think Parliament will be very willing to put the legislation through without great clarity, as Labour has said, on the so-called partnership—the association agreement. For myself, I am going to need a lot of persuading, because I think the money is far too great and the transition delay, so-called, is far too long. I am also extremely concerned that we will give up one EU treaty only to sign up to another two, which look to me as if they will have many of the problems that we had from the original.

Strategic thinking for defence

As the UK moves on from substantial military interventions in the Middle East we need a new statement of why we have armed forces and how we wish to use them. Past Secretaries of State for defence have tended to be preoccupied with day to day battles over budgets, with defence reviews that have been budget exercises in the main, and until recently with a series of difficult interventions in Middle Eastern wars alongside our allies. They have not set out clearly what our longer term aims as a country are and how well trained and equipped forces can help us achieve them. It would be a good task for the relatively new Secretary of State to set out what our forces should be and what they can do in the years ahead.

We need to look to history to see what we have needed in the past. The UK has been an active and engaged country with interests around the world. We have used our forces to back up our trade and diplomacy. We have stood in recent

years for democracy, freedom and self determination of peoples, intervening against aggressors in places like Kuwait and the Falklands.

Today we do not see any threat of invasion and are enjoying a peace which has been long and enduring with our nearest neighbours. Over the longer haul we have stood against any single dominant military power emerging on the continent, where such a dominant power proceeds by conquest and eclipses liberties and self determination for smaller countries. This has required substantial forces to overcome Spanish aggression in the sixteenth century, French aggression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and German aggression in the twentieth. We had to defeat a seaborne armada that got close to our coasts in 1588 from Spain, had to defeat the combined Spanish and French fleets at Trafalgar to prevent their seizing the channel to allow an invasion to cross the narrow seas, and had to win the battle of Britain in the air in 1940 to avoid a German invasion. Defence of the home base mainly required seapower, boosted by airpower in 1940. Control of the Channel was a successful first line of defence in each case. Only once since 1066 have we been successfully invaded. This was in 1688 by the Dutch when much of the British establishment welcomed the invading force and accepted William and Mary's claim to the throne.

The first duty of our defence forces must be to prevent invasion of our home islands, Fortunately we live in an age when a planned invasion from a nearby continental European country looks impossible. This should not, however, lead to complacency as history has taught us that a threat can emerge swiftly and needs countering and in a mobile age can come from further afield.

History also shows us that the UK has in the past intervened in large wars with land forces. Here our experiences have been more mixed and often marred by bitter and large loss. Usually government commits the country to a war which our available forces cannot possibly win as they are too small. During the war there has to be a massive investment in personnel and weaponry to scale the forces to the task in hand. In 1914 a small highly professional army was committed to the continent ill prepared for contemporary trench and machine gun warfare, only to lose a large proportion of the force. The next four years were spent recruiting a massive citizens army and training it to modern realities to go on to win with our allies. After the US joined in 1917 the mass killing stalemate at last started to move in the direction of an Allies win. In 1939 again a small professional force was committed to the continent, only to be forced into rapid and dangerous retreat, losing much of its equipment and requiring the miracle evacuation of Dunkirk to save most of the people. Thereafter a larger army was recruited and the continent successfully retaken once the US and other forces joined the cause. We should learn from this experience that we need enormous flexibility of supply and recruitment should a national emergency arise.

The second duty of our forces is to be available to handle any national emergency where they can assist the civil power. Great Britain has a long tradition of not wanting a standing army, and resisting interference from the military in politics. Today we have a very professional army that keeps to its clearly understood constitutional role, and is available and willing to help in flood relief or disaster response if needed. As the armed forces have

heavy lift helicopters, other military vehicles, and fit and well trained personnel available it makes sense in extreme conditions to ask them support the civilian services that normally handle these matters.

The third duty of our forces is to be available for intervention abroad. If a dependent territory or ally needs military help, or if we need to contribute to a UN mission as members of the Security Council, we need to have flexible and responsive forces that can be taken to a trouble spot or war promptly and effectively. To do this we need the ability to project force by air and sea, and the capacity to lift troops and equipment quickly to where they are needed. This requires carrier groups of ships, air cover and air attack capacity, and heavy lift to take battalions and their vehicles and equipment over long distances.

The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to receive additional funds to help deliver improvements to A & E

Dear John,

The Secretary of State has written to me advising that the Government has allocated £1.6 million to the Royal Berkshire NHS Trust as part of a scheme to help deliver improvements to A & E services this winter. With the cold weather approaching this extra investment will be welcome.

Improved emergency care, new beds, and enhanced equipment as part of major funding boost for hospitals ahead of winter

To make sure the NHS performs as well as it possibly can this winter we are funding hospitals to deliver improvements in their A&E performance.

A total of 81 new schemes, totalling £145 million of capital investment, have been prioritised from within the Department's capital budget for hospitals across the country to help staff prepare ahead of winter.

This funding will enable the NHS to deliver additional beds, redevelop A&E units and upgrade wards, enhance bed management systems, and improve 'same-day' emergency care.

I am delighted to inform you that your local NHS trust will benefit from this funding as part of the action the Government is taking in advance of winter. Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust has identified a scheme that can help with its bed capacity, and has been allocated £1.6m.

Last winter was challenging, but thanks to the efforts and dedication of hard working frontline staff, over 500 more people were seen in A&E and admitted

or discharged within four hours every day. This further investment in the NHS will help those staff to deliver the best possible care for patients this winter.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK

Exiting the EU – some factual background to where we now are

If nothing else is approved by Parliament we will leave the EU on 29 March 2019 with no Withdrawal Agreement or Future Partnership Agreement. If the government does wish to sign such Agreements it will need primary legislation to endorse them and to provide the large sums of money to pay for them . Those of you who want Brexit and are very critical of what has happened should study this carefully, as it shows a lot has been achieved to complete all the legal processes for exit next March. The present rows are about whether effective exit should be delayed and whether we should re-enter parts of the EU that otherwise we will simply leave next year. All the spin based on Project Fear Mark 2 gets in the way of a clear understanding of how we leave the EU, and what Parliament has so far decided.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Referendum 23 June 2016 17.4 million vote to leave the EU, 16.1m vote to remain in EU

Told by government in a letter to all households that voters would decide and Parliament would carry out the decision.

16 March 2017 Royal assent to EU(Notification of Withdrawal) Act

Gained 3rd reading in Commons by 494 votes to 122

Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed

This fulfils all international and EU law requirements to leave on 29 March 2019, with or without additional Agreements.

6 June 2017 UK General election. 83.3% vote for parties promising to implement Brexit

7.4% vote Lib Dem and 3% vote SNP pledging second referendum on terms of exit

EU Withdrawal Act royal assent 26 June 2018

Passed 3rd reading in Commons 324-295

Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed

This means that from the date specified in the Act, 29 March 2019, the UK ceases to be a member of the EU and the jurisdiction of the EU and its Court ceases in the UK. All current EU law at that date becomes good UK law,

subject to any future amendment or repeal the UK may wish to undertake.

Taxation (Cross border trade) Bill passes Commons July 2018

Amended to prevent UK levying customs for EU or other foreign country unless they levy customs for us on a reciprocal basis. Amended to require primary legislation before re entering EU customs union. Amended to prevent UK staying in EU VAT system. This is now in its Lords stages, but as it is a Tax/money Bill they cannot block the will of the Commons.

Currently in negotiation are

Draft Withdrawal Agreement containing a 21 month Transitional period, additional UK financial contributions after March 2019, reassurances to citizens living in each other's territory

A possible political Agreement about good intentions to negotiate an Association Agreement between UK and EU governing a future partnership. This could include a free trade agreement, a defence and security partnership, data sharing, criminal justice co-operation and much else. The UK insists on linkage between the two possible Agreements. Both sides say nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Both sides need Parliamentary approval.

The so called Chequers compromise is the current UK offer to the EU over the future partnership. The EU has stated it cannot agree the idea of partial membership of the single market, nor the proposals on common customs and tariffs between UK and EU.

The EU has in the past implied that a Canada style free trade deal with fewer tariffs and more service provision than the EU Canada Agreement is on offer, but only for Great Britain. There remains a substantial disagreement between various parties on the issue of the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland border. The UK refuses to split the treatment of Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, which is important to the DUP members of the Coalition in particular.

[The Lib Dems stake out the undemocratic extreme](#)

"Demand better" says the boomerang Lib Dem slogan. That's good advice when the Lib Dems come round with their proposal to block the wishes of the people and try to overturn the results of the 2016 referendum. Standing on a clear ticket for delay, watering down of Brexit and even a second referendum on terms, they slumped to just 7.4% of the vote in the 2017 election. They had not found the moderate middle, the friendly centre of gravity of the UK electorate as they claim. Their views were far from democratic, as they railed against the decision of the UK voters in 2016. Nor were they very

liberal, as they dreamt up another Manifesto of regulations, higher taxes and exhortations to all of us to change the way we live our lives.

It's a crowded space, this search for the so called moderate centre ground. It is defined as going back to Brussels, saying we are sorry for ever thinking of leaving, and accepting the full swathe of laws, taxes, budgets and common policies that characterise the modern EU. What ever is either moderate or democratic about such an agenda? How is it democratic for more and more laws to be made behind closed doors, drafted by officials we cannot sack or make accountable, and approved by Ministers from 27 countries under pressure not to rock the boat? What is liberal about the austerity policies of the EU's budget controls, requiring higher taxes, lower spending and lower deficits from countries mired in unemployment in the south and west of the EU? How is the EU's policy of helping pay for Turkey's heavily defended borders with the Middle East moderate? What is green about the fishing discard policy or the dash for diesel and the reliance on coal for power by Germany? Why does everything proposed by the EU get through without a whisper of criticism? When will they apologise for the huge damage the Exchange Rate Mechanism did to the livelihoods and businesses of many in the UK, or for the revenge the Euro crisis visited on Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Spain?

The outgoing Leader of the Lib Dems cannot make up his mind exactly when he will leave his job. Maybe he should hold a party referendum on the topic. Nor does he have any confidence in his fellow MPs, saying that they need to open up the contest for a new Leader to people not in Parliament. I guess as he believes laws should be made in Brussels and more control pass to the EU there is a kind of logic to not bothering whether a party leader can argue, question and vote on what we do here at home in our own legislature. It is a further sign of his insouciance towards UK democracy. Into this private debate with a few voters has intruded Tony Blair. A man who did well out of leading the Labour party, he has gone as far as he dare to say his own party under new leadership cannot win an election, and maybe Labour members like him should look around for a new party. Perhaps he has in mind a Social Democrat pro EU break away from Labour, rather like in the 1980s. They would doubtless need to join up with the Lib Dems.

Others looking at this crowded postage stamp of a political position include the hard line group of pro EU Labour MPs who call themselves moderates and who spend most of their time disagreeing with the electors when they are not disagreeing with their own Leader over most things. All of them suffer from the same underlying problem. There has never been a large market for a pro EU party in the UK. When John Stevens set up the pro Euro Conservatives it gained just 1.4% of the vote in the European elections. It peaked at under 4% in the Kensington and Chelsea by election to Parliament and was disbanded owing to a lack of voter support shortly afterwards. I doubt there would be much of a market on the left for a pro EU Labour party that made its peace with the Establishment on a number of issues where Corbyn is more radical. The pro EU Social Democrats never won new seats in a General Election. The Lib Dem result last time should be a warning to them all that trying to stop Brexit gets you to a very poor third place.

What they seek is no moderate centre they can capture. Supporting a new sell

out to the EU is far from being a moderate position to adopt.