

Happy Birthday to the EU

I wish the EU well on its 60th birthday. The exit of the UK gives the EU a real chance to complete its currency union, and its borders union, two central features of the EU project that the UK under all parties in government was unwilling to accept. Freed of UK scepticism and reluctance, maybe the EU can now press on with building its vision of an integrated continent with a single economic policy, a single budget and more powerful Treasury at federal level, and common citizenship with external policed borders. Or maybe they will discover that the people of the other countries of Europe do not buy into that wider vision either.

It should also be time for the EU to reflect on why the UK left, why many parties on the continent are now pressing for their countries to leave the currency or even the whole Union, and why there are persistent and intense problems including high unemployment, migrations, a lack of agreement on the next steps in the Union, and a lack of proper opposition to EU policies within an EU level democratic framework.

Why, for example, has someone like me been such a critic of the EU? After all, I belong to many of the groups that are meant to be believers in the project. I am a globalist. I believe in an outward going foreign policy, freer trade where possible, democracy and tolerance, and the pursuit of peace. These are meant to be the values of the EU leaderships as well, so why didn't they carry me with them?

The answer is two fold. I watched their actions, and saw that so often they did not follow their own stated aims. I also saw that where they thought they were following their aims, they often chose policies which achieved the opposite of their stated ambition.

The biggest disappointment was their wish to build a large one size fits all bureaucracy seeking to control every aspect of life. This was never compatible with the wider ideals of liberty and democracy. It made creating a single demos even more difficult than it was going to be. With so many different languages and levels of economic development it was never going to be easy to get people to believe in a new European state.

They never followed the aim of building democracy into the EU properly. The Parliament was added, but it does not provide the government nor control the government. Too much power rests in the unelected and often unaccountable Commission. These full time officials can manipulate the member states and play them off against the Parliament. There is no organised opposition to the EU government suggesting an alternative programme or approach, or ready to take over when people have had enough a particular EU government. In practice all the new laws are usually Commission ideas brokered with fluctuating factions of member states and the Parliament. The whole development is a ratchet to greater Union, even where past steps have demonstrably failed or proved unpopular.

They never followed the aim of promoting prosperity. Their currency scheme was bound to produce wild booms and busts in differing member states economies, as Ireland, Spain, Greece and others found to their cost. It was all entirely predictable – as I wrote often. After all we had seen the damage the European Exchange Rate Mechanism did. The Euro was just the version of that you could not easily get out of.

Their austerity policies which followed the boom bust entry of the Euro into many economies has created resentments and confined a whole generation of southern young people to unemployment.

They never worked out how to decide who could be a European citizen, and how to run orderly borders. Instead of the tolerance they wanted, they have created hostile attitudes to new arrivals in many parts of the continent.

Their birthday party should be a meeting for reappraisal. Do less, and do it better. Or get consent to the grand vision. Above all, try being democratic for a change. I saw from the beginning that the EU would not be to our liking. I read the Treaty of Rome which was never a Treaty for a free trade area as advertised. It was always a country in the making, where ambition far outran practicality.

[Ofcom consultation](#)

I receive a great deal of correspondence from my constituents about poor service from telephone and internet companies. I am aware how much delays in getting repairs done, missed appointments and starting a new service costs in terms of time and money.

I have received the communication below from the Chief Executive of Ofcom. They are consulting on proposals to require phone and broadband to pay automatic compensation in these cases. The consultation ends on 5 June and you can access it at:






<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-1/automatic-compensation>

“Ofcom has today set out new proposals to require phone and broadband companies to pay automatic compensation – either a cash payment, or a credit on a bill – to customers who suffer slow repairs, missed appointments or delays to starting new services.

When a customer’s landline or broadband goes wrong, that is frustrating enough without having to fight to get fair compensation from the phone company. So we are proposing new rules to force providers to pay money back to customers automatically, whenever repairs or installations don’t happen on time, or when people wait in for an engineer who doesn’t turn up. This would mean customers are properly compensated, while providers will be incentivised

to work harder to improve their service.

Compensation payments would be set by Ofcom, and designed to reflect the degree of harm suffered by consumers. Here is how Ofcom's automatic compensation scheme would work:

Problem	A landline or broadband customer would be entitled to compensation if...	Amount of compensation
Delayed repair following loss of service	Their service has stopped working and it is not fully fixed after two full working days.	 £10 for each calendar day that the service is not repaired
Missed appointments	An engineer does not turn up for a scheduled appointment, or it is cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice.	  £30 per missed appointment
Delays with the start of a new service	Their provider promises to start a new service on a particular date, but fails to do so.	  £6 for each calendar day of delay, including the missed start date

We estimate that our plans would mean up to 2.6 million additional customers could receive up to £185m in new compensation payments each year. Currently, there are 7.2m instances where landline or broadband customers suffer delayed repairs, missed appointments or delays to new installations. Financial compensation from companies, totalling around £16.3m, is currently paid out in 1.1m of these cases.

Around one-third of small and medium-sized enterprises choose residential landline and broadband services and would also benefit from our compensation proposals.

We are consulting until 5th June and plan to publish a statement at the end of the year”.

With best wishes

Helen

[Reassurance to all EU citizens living and working in the Wokingham constituency](#)

I have always said to those worried that I am sure all EU citizens living and working legally in Wokingham now will be free to stay if they wish after Brexit. The UK government has always indicated that is it wish, but pointed

out we need the same assurance for our citizens living on the continent. At last Mr Juncker, the President of the Commission, seems to have said as much. He regards, he says, such a matter as one of “respecting human dignity”. He said “This is not about bargaining”. Exactly.

I will continue to press the EU to do the right thing, as I want all to be reassured that there will be no forced evictions of people following Brexit. I know we all in Wokingham want those full reassurances. We seem to be much closer to them today.

[The President of the Commission gets it right at last](#)

Mr Juncker in his recent interview at last acknowledges that granting the right to stay and to work on the continent for all those UK citizens who currently do so is “about respecting human dignity.” He now says “This is not about bargaining”.

I have been a sustained critic of the EU’s refusal to live up to decent values and reassure all UK citizens living in the EU that they are free to stay if they wish. I am therefore glad The Commission has now shifted its position. I have long been reassuring all EU citizens in the UK who ask that they will be welcome to stay and work here if they wish, as I assumed the EU would not in the end throw UK citizens out. It is just bizarre that it has taken them so long to say so, and strange that even now it is not a formal statement by the rest of the EU as a whole.

If anyone in the UK remains worried about the EU’s intentions then they should write and lobby the Commission and their MEPs. The UK government has always been clear it does not intend to threaten EU citizens living in the UK.

[What should be the age to receive your State pension?](#)

We have received a couple of reports this week discussing the age at which people should be entitled to a State pension based on their NI contributions.

Current policy is to raise the age from 65 to 66 in 2020, and to 67 in 2028. As people live longer, so the cost of their pensions rises without a

proportionate increase in their contributions over their working lives. Whilst the state retirement scheme is a pay as you go one, where each generation pays for its parents generation out of current NI payments, individual pension entitlement is still based on your past contribution record.

The Cridland report suggests raising the age to 69 between 2037 and 2039 and going higher thereafter. The Government Actuary suggests 69 by 2053-5, with another variant bringing in 69 as early as 2040.

The Report also raises the issue of whether after the end of this Parliament there should be some change to the triple lock. Currently the government is pledged to increase pensions each year by the highest of earnings, prices (CPI) or 2.5%. Dropping one or two of these requirements could make progressive savings to the total cost. In recent years the 2.5% minimum has meant pensioner incomes rising faster than incomes in work.

I would be interested in your thoughts on all this. There does seem to be a good case to say that as longevity rises there should be a proportionate rise in the pension age to keep some balance between an individual's contributions when working and their pension receipts. Allowing the triple lock has helped narrow the gap between pensioner incomes and working incomes. There is an issue in how much further people think that should go.