

The German media tantrum

You know people are losing when they resort to personal abuse and bluster. Clearly the German government was unhappy about being told the truth about their 100bn Euro bill for the UK to leave – it is a work of fiction.

I had many dealings with the German government and with their business representatives when I was single market Minister, many when I was making the case for the UK not to belong to the Euro, and a few in the run up to the referendum. The Germans always began in a friendly and diplomatic way, seeking to explain to me why it was in the UK's interests to accept a new law, join the Euro and remain in the EU. They thought I would be sufficiently amenable to see it from their point of view. They kept telling me that if I did not see it their way the UK would lack influence in the EU. That was such a silly irony – you will only have influence if you agree with us on all the big issues!

I used to explain to them that I am a UK MP, not a German one. I have no special insight into what laws, taxes and budgets Germany needs, and am not accountable to German electors for such decisions. I do not seek or expect any influence over the big issues affecting the German economy. In return I do not think Germany can help me and my colleagues in deciding what currency the UK should use, how high our taxes should be, what taxes we should impose, what laws we should have and how we run our borders.

They might then shift their ground and pretend that the EU does not have that much influence after all, and that the UK inside the EU could nonetheless influence its laws. I would explain that the true project, the one they often used to want me to adopt, includes the Euro, Schengen, common defence and much else that does mean major powers at EU level. This is clearly something the UK does not want. I accept and always have accepted that out of the EU they will decide what regulations to impose on companies selling to them, just as the USA decides the terms on which we export to them. The difference is once we are out we do not have to impose those same requirements on everything we make and sell elsewhere if it does not suit us and our customers.

Today we see yet again the German media and probably some in the German and EU governments misjudge the UK position. Once again they think pressure, personal ridicule, scorn will force the UK to see it their way. It did not achieve their end when they tried to pressurise us into joining the Euro. It did not work when they offered Mr Cameron very little, thinking it would be sufficient to secure a stay in vote. It looks like they misread it again.

The truth is the UK can and will leave in March 2019, with or without a deal on the future relationship. I forecast that on that date, even after many more rows and disagreements, planes will still be able to fly from Frankfurt to London, German cars will still be admitted into UK car showrooms, and tourists will still make the pilgrimages between our two countries. The only question is will the EU make this easier, or does it have workable plans to

make it a bit more difficult. We await their answer when they have cooled down. The present intemperate language belittles them. It does not damage us.