

The state of the European Union

Mr Juncker's speech yesterday about the state of his Union contains few surprises. He confirms that "the Euro is meant to be the single currency of the Union as a whole" and sets out a way to make it so. He reasserts the primacy of all EU law and of the European Court of Justice. He wants more majority voting to settle issues. He proposes a European Minister of Economy and Finance. The European Parliament should become the Parliament of the Euro. He wants a "fully fledged European defence union". When I and others foretold this by quoting EU statements and websites before the referendum we were often told by Remain spokesmen that none of this was true. They thought it was still just primarily a single market.

What was more interesting in Mr Juncker's speech was what he left out. He left out the UK altogether, save for one expression of regret towards the end. He referred throughout to the 27 members of the EU as if the UK had already left. I thought we had to stay in until March 2019, and thought we were still the second largest contributor to his salary and all the other costs of the organisation. I can forgive him misusing tenses and looking to the future without us. I cannot excuse him from issuing a new policy of the state of the Union without discussing the loss of a major member and setting out what future relationship he would like with that country. He might have given some indication of how they intend to shape their budgets without us, just as he clearly is impatient to consolidate Euro government into EU government once the main non Euro country leaves.

More bizarre still was his treatment of the topic of trade. He sets out a policy for the EU to negotiate and sign more Trade treaties in the future than they have managed in the past, yet manages to say nothing about whether that includes a Treaty with the UK! If we are to take his new Union enthusiasm for free trade seriously surely he will want to accept the UK offer of a comprehensive zero tariff low barriers trade Agreement with what is the EU's single most lucrative and important export market. Instead he holds out the prospect of doing trade deals with New Zealand and Australia, knowing that they are keen to do deals with the UK as we exit the EU

Mr Juncker may also be personally ambitious. He proposes merging two of the 3 EU/Euro Presidents by offering to amalgamate his role as President of the Commission with the role of President of the Parliament. Step by step the EU is edging towards the idea of a single President with a world profile. As a reminder that Germany still retains disproportionate influence, he grants Mrs Merkel's wish that they will not proceed with Turkish membership after all. It was not so long ago they signed a comprehensive Partnership Agreement, opened their borders to Turkey and looked as if they were speeding up preparations for membership.