

We voted to leave the single market and customs union of the EU

EU representatives still seem to think the UK wants special access to the single market and is desperate to stay in their trading arrangements. They may be fuelled in this mistaken belief by sections of the UK establishment who seem to think the single market is a good construct that we would be wrong to leave.

One of the few things Leave and Remain agreed about in the referendum was leaving the EU meant leaving the single market and customs union. The winners thought this a good thing and the losers thought it was some kind of threat hanging over us. I became a strong critic of the single market when I was the UK's Single market Minister. I was given the task of supervising the UK's response to and involvement in the so called "completion of the single market" in the run up to 1992 when they declared it finished.

The endless Council meetings and negotiations were to complete 282 pieces of law making to regulate all sorts of things people trade. Many of these added little or nothing to trade, and many entrenched in law the preferred ways of making and doing things of large continental companies. They stated "1992 will be a pivotal year in the development of the European Community. It marks the final year of the enterprise to complete the single market" and the year when they went on to economic and monetary union.

I lost the main argument within the UK government before when I was the PM's adviser. I pointed out you do not need a whole lot of common laws to have a free market. The EU already had established the key proposition, that any good of merchandisable quality in one country could be offered freely for sale in another. This was sufficient in itself. It meant companies could get the benefits of scale and trade their goods freely across the whole EU without tariffs and non tariff barriers. Consumers could decide for themselves if they liked the product and the supporting standards of the sponsor country when making a purchase.

The EU was determined to use the excuse of a single market to greatly expand its legislative control over member states. They demanded the end of the veto over all single market legislation to expedite putting through regulations that were against the interests or traditions of individual countries. I advised the government to only surrender the veto for the 282 specified pieces of legislation, and for it to revert thereafter. The government was not even prepared to protect us to that extent, and the UK swallowed the idea of majority voting for huge swathes of legislation. By the time I became Single market Minister I had to construct blocking minorities of countries every time the Commission came up with another damaging or needless proposal.

As I feared the EU had no intention of limiting itself to 282 laws for its single market, but went on year after year long after the so called completion of the single market pushing out many new laws to exert control

over many new areas all in the name of the single market. The single market was much better at ensuring tariff and barrier free access to the UK for continental manufacturers and farmers than it was at securing access for UK service providers to the continent.