A simple approach for considering EU membership

The campaign for remaining ‘IN’ the European Union in the coming referendum has powerful built-in advantages over the ‘OUT’ or let’s leave alternative. The IN campaign has access to far greater financial and government resources; the voracious support of much of the ruling and political Establishment, including the EU apparatus, the main stream media, and converted ‘Eurosceptics’ satisfied by the ‘renegotiated deal’ on offer; the potential to spread fear of the unknown in leaving, conduct personal attacks on leading Eurosceptics and to wage a dishonest, deceptive, manipulative, censorious and platitudinous campaign. Peter Hitchens provides an opinion about what to expect based on the 1975 EU membership referendum in his recent Blog. There are also other examples of what could happen based on EU referenda in places like Ireland and we have the example of the deceit, concealment, manipulation and vacuous debate of our recent General Election.

The ‘OUT’ campaign is somewhat hampered by a natural risk averse reluctance to change from the status quo (‘the devil you know’) and by the esoteric nature of much of the case for leaving focusing on the less visible damage caused by EU membership and refuting dubious pro-EU arguments. For example, few people know much about the Common Fisheries Policy or EU Public Services Procurement Rules, making it difficult to really say whether or not the UK should be subject to them (which it shouldn’t, in the former case, to save our once great fishing industry and, in the latter, to facilitate innovative free enterprise and save taxpayers’ money). The limited resources of the OUT campaign also make it more difficult to expose false and spurious claims from EU-enthusiasts, although with major parts of the media acting as

an IN propaganda machine it is unlikely such critical examination would get fair treatment anyway, more likely to be shut down immediately.

Looking behind the widely recognised issues of severe damage caused by EU membership, such as uncontrolled immigration*, rampaging bureaucracy, increasing cost and wastefulness, lack of democratic accountability, and bizarre ideological behaviour, there are far more basic questions that could help inform decision making at all levels of wisdom about the EU. This would help a wide range of voters, and facilitate a more open and fair campaign against the arrayed vested interests for remaining IN. These basic, yet important questions are:

1 Would the country be better governed by Brussels (by being part of the EU) or by our own government and Parliament in London?
2 Who would make fewer mistakes and correct them more quickly, our government in London or EU bureaucrats in Brussels?
3 Who would protect our national interests better, our own government, accountable to the People, or unelected EU bureaucrats?
4 Would we be happier, more democratic and peaceful as a sovereign, independent country with our own identity or as an anonymous region of an EU superstate?
5 Would we, as individuals and a country, be more competitive, productive and ultimately prosperous being heavily regulated by a centralised, costly EU bureaucracy or as a fast moving, low tax, entrepreneurial free society?
6 Would it be acceptable to suffer short term pain, in leaving the EU when we choose, to achieve longer term gain?

These fundamental questions could be considered in the light of the existing direction of travel of the EU towards ever greater political and monetary integration, territorial expansion, current and past events, and where the EU will, based on current information, likely be in 10, 20, 30 or more years’ time. Where there is some uncertainty, the balance of

probabilities could be included. With this approach, you don’t need to be an expert or a fortune-teller to be able to reach a reasonably logical and informed judgement quickly, which is likely to be similar to logical conclusions arising from comprehensive investigation and analysis.

The EU fits within longstanding continental European traditions of authoritarian centralised top down rule and does not sit easily with our traditions mainly of property rights, rule of law, democracy and individual freedom. As times change and new challenges arise, is the EU’s *raison d’être* and business model, as it applies to us and perhaps more generally in the modern world, already burdensomely obsolete, and if not now, when?

***Latest statistics show that net migration from the EU in the 12 months to December 2014 was 178,000. From non-EU countries (and therefore something we can control) was 197,000**

Photo by EU Naval Force Media and Public Information Office