

Britain must quit the EU to win back its self-confidence, says Lord Lawson



Quitting the European Union will allow Britain to win back the self-confidence it lost after Margaret Thatcher quit as Prime Minister, Lord Lawson has said.

Lord Lawson of Blaby suggested that Britain was hanging onto its EU membership as a form of comfort blanket, and would prosper by being able to stand alone in the world, outside the EU.

The Tories have pledged a referendum by 2017 if they win next year's general election, while Labour has suggested it might hold one under certain conditions.

Speaking at a private dinner organised by the Institute for Economic Affairs, Lord Lawson – who as Nigel Lawson was Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1983 to 1989 – said: *“We do need a revival of self-confidence. In 1979 we inherited a country that lacks self-confidence.*

“One of the most important things that a Thatcher government did was change the mood of the nation to give it back its confidence. This clutching hold of the EU is a sign of a lack of national self-confidence – which is not healthy.”

Lord Lawson chaired the £82,000 Brexit prize, organised by the Institute for Economic Affairs, which looked at the opportunities for Britain if the UK left the EU. It was won by Iain Mansfield, a foreign office diplomat, who entered in a personal capacity.

David Cameron, the Prime Minister, has hinted that he is

likely to fight for the UK to remain part of a reformed EU if changes have been made ahead of any referendum.

Mr Cameron has previously warned that quitting the EU would leave Britain with the same status as Norway – trading with the EU but no influence of how it is run.

But Lord Lawson said these comparisons were wrong-headed. He pointed out that the Norwegian and Swiss economies were not doing badly and had benefited from being outside the EU.

Britain was well placed because it was a large country which would see its influence grown as its population rises for the next 15 years.

In contrast's the populations in Germany and in France are forecast to fall and remain static respectively over the same period.

Last month, writing in The Sunday Telegraph, Mr Cameron said:
"If I am Prime Minister after the election, I will negotiate a new settlement for Britain in Europe, and then ask the British people: do you wish to stay in the EU on this basis, or leave?"

"I will hold that referendum before the end of 2017, and respect the decision."

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