

Daniel Hannan and EFTA

Daniel Hannan has long been a trenchant spokesman for independence from the EU. His speeches on returning to our constitutional parliamentary traditions have enlivened and inspired many meetings of activists over the years, so we felt that his views, excerpted from his Sunday Comment column would be of interest.

“...The UK has indicated that it is prepared to be helpful but only as part of an amicable overall settlement. We’re plainly not going to pony up until we know what we are getting in return.

“There are three slugs of money at stake. First, Britain’s legal obligations, paying the pensions of its Brussels officials, for example. That part is uncontroversial. Britain is not the sort of country to walk away from its debts.

“Second there are EU programmes with which we may wish to remain involved , as many other non-members do. The EU’s educational exchange scheme, Erasmus, covers countries from Norway to Turkey. Its scientific research fund, Horizon 2020, includes Armenia and Israel. Obviously, if we stay in such projects, we’ll cover our share of the costs.

“Third there is the question of contributions over and above what is legally required. This is what David Davis means when he talks about a settlement “in accordance with the law and the spirit of the UK’s continuing partnership with the EU”.

“The four members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), namely Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, for example, pay to upgrade the infrastructure in the EU’s ex communist countries, in exchange (though the linkage is not official) for preferential deals in other areas. They do so unfussily and in a spirit of hard-headed transaction. Cherry picking is fine as long as you pay for the cherries.

"If there is no deal, the question of assets and liabilities will go to international arbitration and the EU will get only the first and smallest of the three chunks.

"Logic points to a trade-off. Britain should aim to keep some institutional links with the EU and pay accordingly, while taking back control of its laws. Apart from anything else, such a deal would reflect the narrowness of the referendum result.

"The trouble is, human beings are not always logical. Some Eurocrats still believe, because they want to believe, that if the talks go badly enough, Britain will change its mind.....Some Remainers see failure as their way back into the EU. Some Leavers grumpily oppose any compromise.

"How can we improve the mood ? Perhaps by convincing the EU that we want to build something rather than simply to dismantle something. One option is to seek to lead other nearby countries that either won't join the EU or don't meet its criteria, but which want friendly trade links with it.

"Of the 47 states in the Council of Europe, 19 are outside the EU, and many are happy that way. Public opinion in the EFTA countries, for example, is overwhelmingly against joining. Britain, whose economy is larger than that of those 19 states combined, might aim to organise an outer tier, linked to the EU through a common market, not a common government....

"...This idea of a market-only membership category was promoted by federalists in Brussels before the referendum and most EFTA governments expected Britain to pursue it afterwards. According to all opinion polls, it is popular here too. Now is the moment to dust it off."

These extracts from the original article were reproduced with permission of the author.