

# Why Herr Steinmeier is so wrong about Brexit

Last Tuesday, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the newly-elected President of Germany, delivered a very outspoken message to the European Parliament, highly critical of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

"It is wrong to say, in my conviction, that in this world a single European country standing alone and without the EU can make its voice heard or assert its economic interests", he said. "Quite to the contrary." He called last year's Leave campaign "naive and irresponsible" and strongly attacked the concept of taking back control. "Take back control is a strong slogan that we hear everywhere. Nationalists are unable to deliver it and if it can be delivered at all, it is something we can only do together. It is irresponsible to lead people to believe that, in a world that is becoming more complex, the answers are becoming more simple." He dismissed our desire to return to being a self-governing nation state and called those of us who voted to leave the EU "bitter".

Earlier in the day, Manfred Weber, a fellow-German who leads the European People's Party grouping in the European Parliament said that "Some of the politicians in London have not understood what leaving the European Union means. It means being alone."

It is very apparent than many on the Continent still feel very uncomfortable about Brexit. This is not going to make the already complex task which our negotiators are about to begin any easier, but this does not alter the fact that we were right in voting to leave the EU and regain our sovereignty.

Herr Weber's claim that we will be alone is a very myopic, Eurocentric view of the world. On leaving the EU, the UK will

still be a member of the G20, G8, NATO, the Commonwealth, the World Trade Organisation and a host of other international bodies. We will regain the ability to arrange our own trade deals with other countries. Places at our universities will still be in demand worldwide. London will still be a magnet for tourists – and a global financial centre to boot. Hardly a picture of splendid isolation.

It must be conceded that a change of mindset will be needed in both Westminster and Whitehall. Our politicians and civil servants will need to adjust to the hard truth that the buck will soon stop with them and no longer with anyone in Brussels. This is hardly a bad thing, however and is after all, the norm in the 160+ countries that are not members of the EU.

More importantly, however, Steinmeier's defence of pooled sovereignty is an anachronism. It goes back to the immediate post-war period when politicians and bureaucrats between them were seen as the answer to all the issues facing the world at that time. Seventy years on, politicians and bureaucrats have instead become part of the problem. Only a handful of anarchists and libertarians believe that mankind could one day manage without any government, but there is a very convincing case to be made that we need a lot less government and such government as we do require needs to be a lot more accountable to us, the voters. The EU's institutions, notably the unelected Commission, are far more accountable to lobbyists and big multinationals than to the voters of the member states.

To suggest therefore that an organisation with as serious a democratic deficit as the EU is necessary to solve the world's problems is quite frankly laughable. The EU's track record in addressing issues in its own back yard, such as the migrant crisis, is hardly impressive and it must bear much of the responsibility for the catastrophe which has engulfed Greece in recent years.

Meanwhile, non-EU Switzerland and Norway seem unperturbed by their seeming economic impotence. Both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank reckon them among the top 10 wealthiest nations in the world. Leaving the EU is not going to result in the UK shooting up the rankings as soon as the Brexit deal is signed, sealed and delivered, but it will at least set us up for a longer-term recovery from the long, wasted years of subservience to Brussels.

In short, Herr Steinmeier's criticism of Brexit voters as "bitter" is complete and utter baloney. There may well be a few bumps on the rocky road to Brexit, but the underlying reasons for wanting to leave this club of failures are sound and sensible. After all, is it really "naive" or "irresponsible" merely to wish to re-join the rest of the world whose nations seem to manage remarkably well without being members of the EU?