

Mission Impossible

Donald Tusk, the former Prime Minister of Poland who took over from Herman van Rompuy as President of the European Council, didn't mince his words. David Cameron's hope of reopening the EU treaties to secure a bespoke relationship for the UK within the EU is virtually "mission impossible." Mr Tusk said that he would offer the Prime Minister his support "because he is obviously pro-European" but stated that securing a consensus among all the member states would not be easy. "We need unanimity between 28 member states, in the European parliament, in 28 national parliaments in the process of ratification. To say that it is a Pandora's Box is too little."

Already, Cameron has been told that free movement of people is not negotiable. Concerns about immigration are one of the main reasons why many in the UK are unhappy about our present relationship with the EU. His chances of an opt-out from the phrase "ever closer union" don't look that great either, even though it would only be a symbolic gesture.

Less than a week announcing that George Osborne is going to head up the UK's negotiating team, it cannot have pleased Mr Cameron that a senior European politician has pointed to the difficulties he faces. He was pretty cock-a-hoop last week, saying that, while his legal advice was that treaty changes were needed he claimed "legal advice in the European Union is a strange beast" and was often surprisingly flexible. He went on to say that "I think this is the moment Britain stops sleepwalking towards the exit."

This silly phrase has been used before – by Ed Miliband of all people. It is pretty meaningless as it implies that supporters of withdrawal want to make it happen without anyone realising what is going on. Far from it. We want to let people know how bad the EU is for us and for them to make an informed choice

to leave. If the arguments can be presented clearly, the case for withdrawal is overwhelming. Mr Tusk's intervention is an encouragement as it suggests that he doesn't share David Cameron's confidence that he can pull off Harold Wilson's trick in 1975 and fob off the electorate with a "smoke and mirrors" renegotiation that actually repatriates nothing of any significance. Still, we must not jump the gun. There is firstly a matter of Cameron securing a victory over that man he famously called "weak, weak, weak".....

Photo by Editor B 