

# National Self-confidence

As predicted, David Cameron's much-vaunted speech about immigration was a damp squib – anything but a “game changer”. Given that the Prime Minister is believed to have cleared the speech with Auntie Angela in Berlin beforehand, anyone hoping for a seriously tougher line was inevitably going to be disappointed. Furthermore, No. 10 is widely believed to be close to Open Europe and their research suggested that Cameron might get away with restrictions on access to benefits by immigrants from the EU but even a temporary cap on migration levels would run into opposition, let alone talk of an end to the principle of free movement of people. This is exactly what we got (or didn't get) from Mr Cameron

Whether this speech will satisfy UKIP supporters or wavering Conservative voters is another matter. However, it has resulted in a number of supporters of EU membership coming out of their holes. Take Pat Macfadden, for instance. Writing in *The Guardian*, he says that “leadership is about standing up for Britain as a confident outward-looking country open to people, ideas and investment and keen to be a leading player in the EU and globally.” In other words, he equates national self-confidence and a worldwide outlook with EU membership. Supporters of withdrawal are, to quote Mr. Macfadden, “looking for a rewind button to a world that no longer exists.”

This is pure codswallop. It was precisely because we *lost* our self-confidence that we joined the EU. Dean Acheson, the US foreign Secretary, famously said in 1962 that “Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role.” By the end of the decade, we were fast becoming “the sick man of Europe”, Union militancy and a lack of innovation caused our economy to lag behind those on the continent. Joining up with these dynamic countries on our doorstep was seen as a way of restoring our confidence. However, it was the Thatcher reforms, not the EEC (as it then was), that put us onto a path

back to growth and restored our image at home and abroad, while at the same time, the dynamism of much of Continental Europe began to peter out. We were self-confident enough to see the pitfalls of joining a single currency and kept out. We are now self-confident enough to know that we can prosper outside the EU. After all, a number of successful European nations are not EU members and they have no intention of joining. These countries cannot remotely be accused of narrow introversion. Norway gives the highest percentage of Gross National Income in development aid of any country in Europe while Switzerland hosts a number of international organisations including the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation.

Only one has wobbled recently – Iceland. Significantly, it was when their banks collapsed, along with their national self-confidence that this small country briefly gave serious consideration to join the EU. It was a painful time, but now they have pulled through, their self-confidence has returned and accession talks with the EU have been kicked into touch.

It is worth reminding Mr Macfadden that it was the lack of confidence in the concept of the nation state following the Second World War which gave birth to the idea of the EU – a defeatism that never caught on in this country and hasn't done so in the rest of the world. Look beyond Europe and you will see that the EU with its "pooled" sovereignty is a weird abnormality

As Mark Reckless said in his acceptance speech in Rochester a week ago, "the world is bigger than Europe." Indeed. Free from the EU, the UK will prosper. We can take our place again on international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation. We can strike free trade agreements with the growing economies of the world like China and India without having to wait for the EU to do so on our behalf.

And as for the "rewind button to a world that no longer

exists," it is the Europhiles who are locked into the past. The EU came to birth in an age when unwieldy bureaucratic international organisations were seen as the solution to the world's problems. As the eurozone's recent dismal economic performance proves only too well, they have instead become part of the problem. Lord Lawson was quite right when he stated that the EU was "past its sell-by date." Things have moved on since the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957. Unfortunately, Macfadden and his ilk don't seem to have noticed.