

Once again, Owen Paterson is talking more sense than his Party leader

Now the dust has begun to settle after the General Election, the first Tory withdrawalist has already broken cover. Owen Paterson, a former Cabinet minister, used the accidental leaking of an e-mail to the Guardian Newspaper by a Bank of England official regarding its secret plan to investigate the impact of quitting the EU to make the point that we could actually be better off by regaining our independence.

On Radio 4's *Today* programme, he reiterated the key point he made in a speech late last year – namely, that leaving the European Union did not mean quitting the European Economic Area.

“The European Union is a political construct, and the jobs and the prosperity are delivered by the market,” he said. “We have an opportunity to get back to the arrangement we voted to join in 1975 and ... very importantly we can completely re-galvanise the single market in areas such as services which we completely need. Most importantly we would get our seat back on the global bodies which decide regulation. There is absolutely a very clear option for us to play a major role in the single market and be very significant members of the EEA without participating in the political and judicial arrangements of the EU. And it is very important to get that message across. I see a really optimistic, positive future for us.”

Mr Paterson said Britain was being forced out of the EU after being left behind by the Eurozone countries as they effectively formed a “new country” by framing policies to support struggling economies such as Greece. “We can never go

there. We're never, ever going to join the euro," he said. He added that while it was legitimate for the Bank of England to explore the impact of leaving the EU, it should not view quitting as "a leap into some terrible black abyss. There are various options which can deliver prosperity, increase jobs ... which is as members of the single market...It isn't either remain in the European Union or leap into the dark. There are other options."

He later dismissed claims by Lord Hill, the UK's European Commissioner, who claimed that there was an "extraordinarily strong case" for Britain to remain in the EU. "My deepest respect to Jonathan, who I served in the Cabinet with", said the former Environment Secretary, "but he is totally and utterly wrong. He is a member of the establishment; we all know where they are coming from. We need time to make the case that there is an incredibly optimistic destination. His idea that trade is synonymous with the European Union is complete and utter tosh. We would under any sane solution continue very active membership of the market."

Given the odds that the "out" campaign faces, it is very encouraging to have a former Cabinet Minister not only coming out so clearly in support of withdrawal but also advocating the only scenario which is likely to win a referendum. It seems that supporters of EU membership just do not want to hear the obvious solution to the "renegotiation" conundrum and dismiss it out of hand. Of course, the former Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, who coined the widely-quoted phrase "Fax diplomacy" isn't wildly keen on his country's relationship with Brussels **BECAUSE HE STUPIDLY WANTS NORWAY TO JOIN**. Thankfully, most of his countrymen have somewhat more common sense. They appreciate the freedom that their position outside the EU gives them. While membership of the EEA plus EFTA is not a perfect scenario and hardly an ideal long-term relationship with the EU, 80% of Norwegian voters believe it is better for their country than membership and as Mr Paterson

has pointed out so eloquently, it would be much better for the UK as well.

(with thanks to The Daily Telegraph)