

The reasons why they want us to stay are the same reasons why we should leave

The prospects of “Brexit” are worrying the leaders of some of the other 27 member states. Benoît Cœuré, a senior official at the European Central Bank, said that UK withdrawal would create an “enormous shock” to the bloc that would be “very difficult to manage” and David Cameron’s nemesis, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated that he does “not want the EU without Britain”.

Why do they want us to stay? After all, we’ve been throwing spanner after spanner in the federalist works for some 40 years now. No UK government has ever been enthusiastic about either a common EU defence policy or harmonising tax rates across the member states. We opted out of the euro, Schengen and imposing VAT on food, among other things. In fact, most of the population really just want a trading relationship. Sharing our sovereignty does not appeal. Wouldn’t the other member states really be better off if they pursued their federalist dream without us?

Well, for starters the EU budget would suffer if we left. We have been net contributors to the budget in every year bar one since joining the EEC in 1973. The EU-funded reconstruction of Eastern Europe’s infrastructure would not be able to proceed so quickly without the contribution of UK taxpayers – in other words, people like you and me.

It’s not only our money they want – it’s our fish. Our coastal waters, especially the North Sea, were among the best fishing grounds in Europe. No wonder that the Spanish, with the largest fishing fleet in the EU, were keen to take advantage of the Common Fisheries Policy when they joined the EU in

January 1986.

Then there's the role that the UK has played in reducing trade barriers and encouraging financial discipline. We are also seen as a counterbalance to the historical dominance of the Franco-German axis. The open economies of Eastern Europe view us as an ally against the more protectionist nations such as France. Were we to leave, there are fears that the EU would retreat into inward-looking protectionism. Jens Weidmann, the president of Germany's Bundesbank, recently said, "If Britain continues to make its voice heard in Europe, I am confident that the union will become more outward-looking, open and prosperous for that."

But these very same reasons the other members want us to stay are precisely why we should leave. Our current direct contribution to EU funds may only amount to £750 per household for the year, but how many hard-pressed families would not rather have an extra £15 in their pockets to help with their ever-increasing food and energy bills? Then, there's the damaging effects of the Common Fisheries Policy both on the UK fishing industry, which shrank in size by one third in the decade to 2005 alone, and on the viability of fish stocks in our territorial waters, which have suffered considerably thanks to over-fishing by the Spanish in particular and the damaging policy of quotas, which has resulted in many fish being dumped dead back into the waters.

Turning to the checks and balances between the various member states, maybe the EU would become more protectionist if we left. Maybe Club Med would be more likely to rise up against German-imposed austerity. However, the bottom line of trying to reach consensus among such a diverse group of nations is that what you end up with in reality is compromise. Free from having to agree a common position with the rest of the EU, our leaders could once again make decisions that were in the interest of the British people who, after all, are the people who elect them to office in the first place.

If our departure precipitates a collapse of the EU, it will be messy but in the longer term, a blessing for the entire continent. The whole project is fatally flawed and, like other enforced political unions in the past, may well end in tears. On the other hand, if, against the odds the EU is still in existence in fifty years' time, it will have advanced into the federal superstate that has always been the dream of its staunchest supporters. For all the supposed benefits of having the UK on board, we would have continued to remain a formidable obstacle to this federalist agenda.

So whatever the future of the European project, it will be better for the rest of the EU as well as for us if we go our separate ways.