

Switzerland follows Iceland in withdrawing EU membership application

For many years now, Swiss membership of the EU has seemed about as likely as Ken Clarke campaigning for Brexit. Yesterday (16th June), the country followed Iceland in formally withdrawing its membership application.

The bilateral treaties which govern Switzerland's relationship with the EU took well over a decade to negotiate and are thus unsuitable as an immediate post-Brexit model for the UK, given the two-year timescale of Article 50. However, looking to the longer term, there is much about Switzerland's internal political system which is worthy of emulation, notably its strong democratic process, which enables ordinary voters to hold their elected representatives to account via binding referendums.

The understandable reluctance to surrender this power is a strong factor behind the long-standing Swiss hostility to the EU. The only surprise about yesterday's announcement is that it has been so long in coming. Perhaps the timing may reflect a desire to help the Brexit cause in the UK? We can only guess, but, according to the Daily Mail. Thomas Minder, counsellor for Schaffhausen state and an active promoter of the concept of 'Swissness,' told Neue Zürcher Zeitung he was eager to 'close the topic fast and painlessly' as only 'a few lunatics' may want to join the EU now.