

# A voice from the past still locked in the past

Following on from Gordon Brown emerging from oblivion to rescue the “No” campaign in Scotland, Sir John Major has returned from obscurity to tell a foreign affairs think tank in Germany that there was a 50/50 chance of our country leaving the EU. On that he was probably right. Those of us who desire such an outcome recognise that we’re a long way from having it in the bag. It’s going to be a long, hard battle to secure “Brexit”. However, our former Prime Minister was profoundly wrong when we went on to say that our country would sink to a much lower level of relevance if we left the EU. How relevant are we? It is actually quite bizarre that other nations see us as relevant at all when you think how little power we really have. This has been all too cruelly exposed by the recent demand by the European Commission for the UK to pay an extra €2.1 billion into the EU budget. David Cameron’s initial response was to state he would refuse, but this proved to be only grandstanding. At the end of the day, although George Osborne claims to have negotiated a reduction, the bottom line is that when a foreign, unelected bureaucracy tells us to cough up more money, we are powerless to tell it where to go. There are countless other examples of our powerlessness. We don’t have the freedom to strike our own free trade agreements with other countries – indeed, we don’t even have the freedom to determine how our bananas should be labelled!

The idea that you can only be relevant in the modern world by giving up the power to govern yourself seems very odd when viewed from an international perspective. It has certainly not caught on outside Europe. China, Japan, Australia, Canada, Russia and the USA – to name just a few – have no desire to “pool” their sovereignty with their neighbours and who can

blame them when they look at the EU and the ongoing crisis in the Eurozone?

So it's understandable that many in the UK are distinctly unimpressed with the EU – even if many people still have no idea that the objective has always been to create a federal superstate – an United States of Europe. If our politicians were urging us to join the EU now, it is inconceivable that they would win a majority in favour of accession. However, we're in and the difficult bit is how to devise a foolproof strategy to get us out which will preserve our trading arrangements and avoid job losses in the short term. Thankfully, a number of eminent researchers including Dr Richard North and Robert Oulds of the Bruges Group have put in some considerable work on creating a “road map” and it is definitely feasible. Once we are out, we will actually become more relevant in the world. We are still likely to remain one of the biggest 10 economies in the world for a good few years to come and will be free to redirect our trade towards the world's growing economies instead of being so tied to the sclerotic eurozone. The use of English as the common language of world commerce will still work to our advantage and we can repeal countless EU-inspired rules and regulations that inhibit our attractiveness for foreign investors. We will not need to become involved in overseas problems of no real interest to us such as the current conflict in Ukraine. We could use our weight to reinvigorate EFTA, the European Free Trade Association, as a genuine free trade-only alternative to the EU. Our finance industry in the City could resume the levels of growth seen before regulation was handed over to Brussels by Gordon Brown when he signed the Lisbon Treaty so we could once again be a world leader in this field, alongside Hong Kong and Singapore. We could also determine who (if anyone) should be allowed into this country rather than being forced by the EU to open our borders to all and sundry from 27 other countries, some of whom we have very little in common with.

In short, the EU, like John Major, is past its sell-by date. It was brought to birth in the post-war era when it was believed that big international institutions could solve all the world's problems. Time has showed that these institutions and the unelected "experts" that lead them have instead become part of the problem. Re-establishing our national sovereignty will therefore be shaking off an encumbrance – an event akin to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe 25 years ago. Like those momentous scenes in 1989, withdrawal would be an occasion for celebration and in no way would it herald any reduction in our relevance as a nation on the world stage. Let us ignore the John Majors of this world, locked into an obsolete mindset. The future is freedom. The future is independence.