

## EU Demand

THIS week's surprise demand from the EU that the UK should pay a Â£1.7billion tax for our economic growth is an outrage and I'm delighted that the PM has ruled out paying it.

Why should the UK be supporting failed European economies that have not taken the tough decision that we have over the last few years?

It simply underlines why last week I supported the EU referendum bill in Parliament because I am clear that the democratic consent for Britain's membership has worn thin – this demand is just the latest reason why.

Now more than ever people want a say over our future relationship with Europe. The EU is changing and these changes raise a series of fundamental questions about the future of the EU and Britain's place within it.

While some may want to bury their heads in the sand, these questions are not going away and remain convinced we should be playing a leading role in shaping the debate. The Conservative Party's preference is to enact these changes for the entire EU, not just for Britain. But if there is no appetite for a new Treaty for us all, then Britain should be ready to address the changes we need.

Only the Conservatives have a plan for Britain's settlement in the EU – to undergo a renegotiation of this deal so that it works for Britain, and to put the outcome of that renegotiation to the British people in an in-out referendum by the end of 2017.

In his speech to the Conservative Party conference, the Prime Minister made clear that taking back control of immigration will be at the heart of his renegotiation strategy with Europe.

Now, let me be clear, believe that the UK has benefited from an immigrant workforce but the 'open door' approach that the last Government encouraged must be brought under control.

With both Labour and the Lib Dems opposed to giving the people of Britain a say, at the next election the choice is clear; if you want a referendum on whether Britain should remain in the EU or leave, only the Conservative Party will guarantee to hold one.

I have always been a Euro-sceptic since my days of running a manufacturing business, welcoming free trade with Europe but suffering from the burden of European directives and legislation.

I've always believed the true test of membership of the EU was whether it provides significant benefit to the people of the UK which is why in 2009 I voted against the Lisbon Treaty because I did not believe it was in my constituents' interests. Last week's events simply underline my view.

Equally I believe that there are other elements of EU membership that have benefited the UK, such as the free movement of goods and the promotion of free trade. These were the

original objectives our partnership with the EU brought and ones which we must protect in the interests of Britain.

With so much mutual benefit in trade, I do not buy the argument that to leave the EU would end all trade especially at a time when our global non EU trade is increasingly so rapidly, if its works for Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, why not us?

I simply believe that now is the time to stop and take stock of our relationship with the EU, renegotiate a new deal that ensures national sovereignty is maintained on the key issues that affect us and most importantly, once that renegotiation is done, it's the British people who must decide our future relationship with Europe.