

EU Referendum

I confess to be rather jealous of those who are already clear in their mind how they will vote in the EU referendum now set for the 23rd of June. This date is significant, less than a year ago there were many who doubted it would ever happen, but the Prime Minister deserves credit for delivering on his promise and making this referendum a reality and ensuring that all of us, not just MPs, will cast our vote.

Personally I am genuinely undecided about how to vote. I confess to being deeply conflicted- I am a Eurosceptic at heart but my head is telling me to pause before leaping into the unknown. Watching Sterling slide to its lowest level in seven years after the EU referendum starting pistol was fired has simply added to my caution.

I have been clear that my principle objection to the EU has been the drive for ever closer Union, which is why I voted against the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, but with the UK's new 'special status' combined with the referendum lock that was passed by Parliament, this direction of travel I'm pleased to say has now come to an end.

Whilst my concerns over an ever closer Union and any fear of being forced to join a common currency may be allayed, my concerns over our ability to control our own borders have not. The concessions secured by the PM with regard to access to benefits may be welcome, but they do not solve the core issue.

I am equally mindful however that here in Milton Keynes we have employment and inward investment at unprecedented levels and the highest jobs growth rate in the UK. We cannot be complacent, but what is the risk if we take the leap of faith and leave the EU? Can we just assume that all of this will continue if we are forced to try to renegotiate trade treaties that may take many years to finalise? Norway and Switzerland are often cited as countries that are not in the EU but trade successfully with it. This is true, but what is not often said is that they too are subjected to EU migration rules to earn the preferential trade deals just as we would be. Switzerland recently voted in a referendum to limit EU migration but have been unable to enforce it lest they breach their trade treaty. Would the EU be prepared to treat the UK differently to Norway and Switzerland? Are the potential benefits really worth the risk? These are the questions we need to resolve over the coming months.

In recent weeks, I have had the opportunity to talk to many constituents in person about this matter and it was clear to me that many share my concerns. Many like me are frustrated about the financial expense and bureaucratic burden of the European Union, but simultaneously recognise the value of being able to reform our relationship from within, fearing the uncertainty for our local economy and people's jobs if we were to leave.

To me this is a marginal decision, with inadequate facts to be completely sure. To vote 'In' does not mean you are a Europhile or lover of all things European, and to vote 'Out' does not mean that you cannot appreciate the benefits of our relationship with Europe.

So where do I stand? On balance my starting point, based on my concerns as to what a period of uncertainty could bring to the thriving MK economy, is to put my personal prejudices to one side, 'hold my nose' and be a reluctant 'in' supporter for the sake of

sacrificing the thriving local MK economy. I'm no fan of the EU, it is a deeply flawed organisation, but at the moment, based on the reforms delivered by the PM and the likelihood of more to come with German support over tackling migration, I am not currently prepared to take that leap of faith into the unknown that the 'Out' campaign want me to do. The 'Out' campaign wins on emotion, but we need more than emotional arguments; give some hard facts as to exactly what that 'out' journey would involve, what would the terms of trade would be and reassurance that the benefits outweigh the enormous risks. Then, like many, I could be persuaded to change my mind.

I respect the views of both sides and I'll not be campaigning, just doing what I believe is right for Milton Keynes.