

Independence!

Independence Day will forever be 23rd June. UK voters decided they wished to be self governing again on that day last year. March 29th will also be high in our affections. Today is the day we send in our formal withdrawal from the EU.

As Lord Pannick argued in Court and in the Lords, the Article 50 letter is irreversible. We will leave the EU within the next two years, with or without an Agreement.

There are those who now wish to change the legal advice from the Remain side. Some now claim the court case argument was just that, a useful argument at the time but not one Remain really believed. I will defend Lord Pannick in his absence. I am sure he is an honourable peer of the realm. This was no mere lawyer using the best argument for his client, but a member of the legislature stating what he as an expert believed the law to be. It was successful. The government would have won the case if the court thought the Article 50 letter was just an invitation to talks about withdrawal. I made all this clear in the Parliamentary debates we held to pass legislation to approve our exit. The court has now done us a favour. We are leaving the EU with a very strong majority of MPs supporting departure, as well as a majority of UK voters. The Act to leave the EU passed with a majority of 372 votes.

Article 50 put in the two year exit provision to prevent a reluctant EU delaying a country's departure by refusing to negotiate an exit agreement sensibly. The UK's despatch of the letter now places the obligations on the rest of the EU to see what they can salvage from their departing member. They should have a long list of things they do not want to lose which is realistic, and another list of things they don't want to lose which are unrealistic.

The first list will encompass protecting their access our lucrative export market, ensuring the position of EU nationals in the UK, keeping access to the City for the money their companies and individuals need to raise, keeping their flying rights into the UK, keeping UK involvement in European defence, and preserving and developing many collaborations on research and joint investment. All of those the UK is willing to grant in return for a punishment free settlement.

The second list may encompass an exit fee, continuing contributions to their budget, and continuing freedom of movement between the UK and the EU. Asking for those will show they still have not understood why we are leaving, nor the weakness of their legal and political position.