



LORD DAVID OWEN DECIDES TO VOTE TO LEAVE

In an historical analysis of the UK's membership of the EU, Lord Owen concludes it is time for the UK to leave the EU in the forthcoming referendum. In his book, first published in 2012 and now extensively revised and updated to take account of his decision to support VoteLeave, Lord Owen recognises “that Europe has moved away from us. Its elite chose a different path long ago and it is not a path the UK ever wished to follow.”

“To remain in the EU is in my judgement a more dangerous option for British security in its deepest sense – economic, political, military and social – than is being admitted or even discussed in the wake of Cameron’s failed negotiations.”

Economically, there is the all-important total absence of any agreed treaty changes to restructure and reform the Eurozone and no timetable for changes, though serious people mention 2023 at the earliest, or 2025, perhaps even longer. The lengthy, unpredictable route of an intergovernmental conference carries no guarantee of the necessary unanimity in all twenty-eight countries.

Politically, there has been no substantive movement on the problems of the compulsory right of free movement of labour between EU member states, which many believe is not strictly needed for the successful operation of a single market but is needed within the Eurozone. By not negotiating for such a change in the EEA not just the UK but the EU lost the opportunity of offering Turkey now, and eventually other states from the wider Europe, full voting membership of the EEA without freedom of movement of labour.

Recently all the member states, including the UK, have compounded that political failure by inexplicably speeding up the entry into the EU of Turkey, a country of more than seventy-five million citizens, complete with free movement of people and labour. Cynically, the EU governments may later intend to slow Turkish entry down when the appalling Syrian crisis is over. But that will have serious geopolitical consequences and could even lead to Turkey leaving NATO.

Militarily, the EU persists in trying to create a ‘common defence’ organisation not just within the EU but in a wider definition of Europe, involving for example Ukraine. In the process it is damaging NATO while most EU countries are still failing to meet their two-year-old pledge to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence. The wording of the EU association agreement with Ukraine was ill thought out and damaging and in itself it triggered the dangerous conflict in eastern Ukraine. Of course Russia was wrong to exploit this and to annex Crimea but the EU should not have been so foolish as to give it the opportunity. No wonder the Dutch people are calling that EU–Ukraine agreement into question in a referendum in April 2016.

Socially, not many people for instance care to admit even within the Labour Party that the destruction in England of the NHS, which was introduced by the Attlee government throughout the UK in 1948, now owes much under successive governments since 2002 to EU market and competition rules. Also signing up to TTIP and CETA health clauses.

This UK referendum is, like all previous referendums, a once-in-a-generation opportunity. There are many positive aspects to leaving the EU. We will make our own laws again in our own parliament. We will rediscover the skills of blue-water diplomacy and rise to the challenge of global markets. It could be the spark we need to re-energise our nation.

The pre-eminent need will be to become more productive and competitive, something driven by investing in research and training and through welcoming immigration from people from different countries who can contribute most to our economy and to our quality of life. These are changes that have a cost attached to them but they are necessary in or out of the EU. They have been largely ducked by political leaders in all parties in recent years. They cannot be ducked any longer if we decide to leave. That in a nutshell is the case for leaving: a challenge and an opportunity.

To take this step we must mobilise a new spirit of courage and conviction. We must leave in a spirit of confidence, ready if need be to accept some discomfort and some temporary difficulties. Very rarely in life do changes come without paying some price or experiencing some pain. But regaining a greater measure of self-government and full control over who comes into this country are significant gains, and the UK would once again be doing things its way and accepting that when the electoral pendulum shifts inside our country real changes can be made that make a difference to people's lives and aspirations.

Attached is pdf copy of Lord Owen's book. It is available via Amazon as from 1 March. ISBN: 978-0-413-77798-0, price 50p.

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David Owen was a Member of Parliament for 26 years from 1966-92. Under Labour Governments, he served as Navy Minister, Health Minister and Foreign Secretary. He was co-founder of the Social Democratic Party established in 1981 and its Leader from 1983-90. He currently sits in the House of Lords as an independent social democrat. From 1992-95 Lord Owen served as EU peace negotiator in the former Yugoslavia and was co-author of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan. From 1999-2005, he was Chairman of New Europe, an organization that successfully campaigned for the UK to stay outside the Eurozone.