

The Future of Britain's Relationship with the EU

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David Cameron

Almost 3 years ago, I made a speech about Europe. I argued that the European Union needed to reform if it was to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. I argued that Britain's best future lay within a reformed European Union, if the necessary changes could be agreed.

And I promised the British people that, if I was re-elected as prime minister, we would have an in-out referendum and the final say on whether our national and economic security is better protected by remaining in the European Union, or by leaving.

That promise is now being honoured. The law of the land will require that there must be a referendum on our EU membership by the end of 2017. The renegotiation is now entering its formal phase, following several rounds of technical discussions. Today I am writing to the president of the European Council setting out how I want to address the concerns of the British people and why I believe that the changes that Britain is seeking will benefit not just Britain, but the EU as a whole.

That will of course be for the negotiation itself to conclude the precise legal changes needed to bring about the reforms Britain needs. But today I want to explain in more detail why we want to make the changes we have set out – and how they will make a difference. This is perhaps the most important decision the British people will have to take at the ballot box in our lifetimes.

So I want to set out for the British people why this referendum matters, and some of the issues we should weigh up very carefully as the arguments ebb and flow as we approach the referendum. And I want to explain to our European partners why we are holding this referendum what we are asking for and why.

Bloomberg – still valid 3 years on

Since I made that speech almost 3 years ago, the challenges facing the European Union have not diminished – indeed they have grown. The economic outlook may be somewhat brighter. But the legacy of the eurozone crisis endures. The threats to our security – and to the security of every European nation – have grown enormously in the last few years from the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine, to the emergence of ISIL, and the migration flows triggered by the war in Syria. And across Europe, the rise of parties of protest demands a response. But nothing that has happened – nothing – has undermined or rendered obsolete the central argument I set out in my speech at Bloomberg. If anything it has reinforced it. The European Union needs to change. It needs to become more competitive to cope with the rise of economies like China and India. It needs to put relations between the countries inside the euro and those outside it – like Britain – onto a stable, long-term basis. It needs greater democratic accountability to national parliaments. Above all, it needs, as I said at Bloomberg, to operate with the flexibility of a network, not the rigidity of a bloc.

Never forget that the European Union now comprises 28 ancient nations of Europe. That very diversity is Europe's greatest strength. Britain says let's celebrate that fact. Let's acknowledge that the answer to every problem is not always more Europe. Sometimes it is less Europe.

Let's accept that one size does not fit all. That flexibility is what I believe is best for Britain; and, as it happens, best for Europe too. Doing what is best for Britain drives everything I do as prime minister. That means taking the difficult decisions, and sometimes making arguments that people don't much want to hear. It is why we have taken the difficult, but necessary action to reduce the deficit. It is why we are seeing through our long-term economic plan. It is why we are reforming welfare and education. Because

we know that the bedrock of our security is a strong economy – and that these are the things any nation must do to succeed in the twenty-first century. It is also why, despite all the pressures on public finances, we have guaranteed to spend 2 percent of our economy on defence and why we are spending 0.7 percent of our gross national income on overseas aid. With that money we are able to equip our armed forces with 2 brand new aircraft carriers double our fleet of drones, buy new fighter aircraft and new submarines and invest in our special forces.

We are doing all of these things to protect our economic and national interest. And that is the prism through which I approach our membership of the European Union. Taking the tough decisions, making the difficult arguments, addressing the issues no one wants to talk about and protecting and advancing our economic and national security.

Like most British people, I come to this question with a frame of mind that is practical, not emotional. Head, not heart. I know some of our European partners may find that disappointing about Britain. But that is who we are. That is how we have always been as a nation. We are rigorously practical. We are obstinately down to earth. We are natural debunkers. We see the European Union as a means to an end, not an end in itself. ‘Europe where necessary, national where possible’, as our Dutch friends put it. An instrument to amplify our nation’s power and prosperity – like NATO, like our membership of the UN Security Council or the IMF. We understand that there is a close relationship between the security and prosperity of the continent to which our island is tied geographically and our own security and prosperity.

In the week when we commemorate the end of the Great War and in the year when we have marked the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Europe, how could we not? Britain has contributed in full measure to the freedom that Europe’s nations enjoy today. Across the continent, from Ypres to Monte Cassino, from Bayeux to Arnhem, in stone cold cemeteries lie the remains of British servicemen who crossed the Channel to help subjugated nations throw off the tyrant’s yoke and return liberty to her rightful place on what Churchill called ‘this noble continent’.

And today, we continue to play our full role in European security and in global security. Fighting Ebola in West Africa. Flying policing missions over the Baltic nations. Contributing to NATO operations in central and eastern Europe. Saving lives and busting the people smuggling rings in the central Mediterranean. Spending £1.1 billion on aid to the region of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan – more than any other European nation. Britain has always been an engaged nation, because we know that engagement is the best way to protect and advance our economic and our national security.

So today, as we confront fresh threats and dangers to our country I am in no doubt that for Britain the European question is not just a matter of economic security, but of national security too, not just a matter of jobs and trade, but of the safety and security of our nation.

Equally, when the European Union accounts for almost half of our trade it matters for our economic security that the European Union is competitive and succeeds in promoting prosperity for its members. Just as it matters to us that – while we are not part of the Euro – and, in my view never will be – the eurozone is able to deal with its problems and succeed.

If it fails to do so, we will certainly not be immune from the side effects. That is why, almost 3 years ago, I set out the case for reform – reform that would benefit Britain, and in my view benefit the entire EU. I was clear that Britain gains advantages from her membership of the EU. But I was also clear that there are some major problems which need to be addressed.

Political leadership means confronting these problems, not wishing them away. If we ignore them, history teaches us that they will only get worse. Let me explain what I mean.

4 major challenges facing the European Union

In my Bloomberg speech almost 3 years ago, I said that the European Union faced 3 major challenges. First, the problems in the eurozone: they need to be fixed – and that will require fundamental changes. Second, a crisis of European competitiveness, as other nations across the world soar ahead and Europe risks being left behind. And third, a gap between the EU and its citizens which has grown dramatically in recent years and which represents a lack of democratic accountability and consent that is felt particularly acutely in Britain. These 3 challenges are as critical now as they were when I first set them out. And today I would add a fourth. As we have seen so spectacularly across Europe with the questions posed by the migration crisis countries need greater controls to manage the pressures of people coming in. And while in Britain we are not part of the Schengen open borders agreement and so we have been able to set our own approach by taking refugees direct from the camps we do need some additional measures to address wider abuses of the right to free movement within Europe and to reduce the very high flow of people coming to Britain from all across Europe.

So the changes we are arguing for are substantial. But they have a very clear purpose: to address these 4 key challenges which are vital to the success of the European Union and to maintain and advance the UK's economic and national security within it.

Let me explain each.

Economic governance and the eurozone

First, it is in all our interests for the eurozone to have the right governance and structures to secure a successful currency for the long-term. Britain understands that, and we will not stand in the way of those developments, as long as we can be sure that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that our own interests are fully protected.

Let me explain what I mean. Today there are 2 sorts of members of the European Union. There are euro members and there are non-euro members. The changes which the eurozone will need to implement will have profound implications for both types of members.

So non-euro members like Britain which are outside the eurozone need certain safeguards in order to protect the single market and our ability to decide its rules and to ensure that we face neither discrimination nor additional costs from the integration of the eurozone. Because the European Union and the eurozone are not the same thing. And those of us who are in the EU but outside the eurozone need that accepted.

We need a British model of membership that works for Britain and for any other non-euro members. And this should be perfectly possible. The European Union is a family of democratic nations whose original foundation was – and remains – a common market. There is no reason why the single currency and the single market should share the same boundary, any more than the single market and Schengen. So the EU needs flexibility to accommodate both those inside and outside the eurozone both those who are contemplating much closer economic and political integration and those countries like Britain which will never embrace that goal. This is a matter of cardinal importance for the United Kingdom. Because if the European Union were to evolve into a single currency club, where those outside the single currency are

pushed aside and over-ruled, then it would no longer be a club for us. We need this issue fixed – so that the UK is not obliged to fight a series of running battles which would only corrode trust among member states. And we have to make sure that there is a point to being in the EU but not in the eurozone, and that that position does not turn a country into a rule-taker instead of a rule-maker. Now is the time to do that.

So as part of our renegotiation I am asking European leaders to agree clear and binding principles that protect Britain and other non-Euro countries and a safeguard mechanism to ensure these principles are respected and enforced.

These principles should include the following. Recognition that the EU is a Union with more than one currency. There should be no discrimination and no disadvantage for any business on the basis of the currency of their country. The integrity of the single market must be protected. As the eurozone moves ahead, any changes it decides to make – like the creation of a banking union – must be voluntary for non-euro countries, never compulsory. Taxpayers in non-euro countries should never bear the cost for operations to support the euro as a currency. Just as financial stability and supervision has become a key area of competence for eurozone institutions like the ECB so financial stability and supervision is a key area of competence for national institutions like the Bank of England for non-Euro members. And any issues that affect all member states must be discussed and decided by all member states.

Competitiveness

Second, we want a European Union that adds to our competitiveness, not detracts from it. We have already made progress since my speech at Bloomberg. Legislative proposals under the new commission have fallen by 80 percent with more regulations set to be repealed this year than in the whole of the previous commission. We have proposals for a capital markets union which will help get finance into the hands of entrepreneurs and growing businesses. The new plans to deepen the single market in services and digital will mean new opportunities for millions of British businesses to operate more easily anywhere in Europe. Changes we secured just last month will mean that British tourists will no longer incur roaming charges when they use mobile phones or have to pay extortionate credit card fees. And just last month the European Commission published a new trade strategy that reflects the agenda that Britain has been championing for years including pursuing massive trade deals with America, China, Japan and ASEAN.

We know the benefits free trade can bring. Recent deals including one with Korea are already saving UK consumers £5 billion every year and have helped UK car exports to Korea to increase five-fold. But there is much more we can do.

For all we have achieved in stemming the flow of new regulations the burden from existing regulation is still too high. Two years ago we secured the first ever real terms cut in the EU budget. It's now time to do the same with EU regulation. So we need a target to cut the total burden on business and at the same time, we need to bring together all the different proposals, promises and agreements on the single market, on trade, and on cutting regulation into one clear commitment that writes competitiveness into the DNA of the whole European Union.

Sovereignty and subsidiarity

Third, we need to deal with the disillusionment that many of Europe's citizens feel towards the European Union as an institution. These concerns are not just in Britain. But they are perhaps greater here than anywhere else in the European Union today. We have already passed a law to guarantee that no powers

can transfer from Britain to Brussels ever again without the explicit consent of the British people in a referendum. But if Britain is to remain in the EU, we need to do more. And really it boils down to this. We are a proud, independent nation. We intend to stay that way. So we need to be honest about this. The commitment in the treaty to an ever closer union is not a commitment that should apply any longer to Britain. We do not believe in it. We do not subscribe to it. We have a different vision for Europe.

We believe in a flexible union of free member states who share treaties and institutions, working together in a spirit of co-operation to advance our shared prosperity and to protect our people from threats to our security whether they come from at home or abroad. And continuing, in time and only with unanimous agreement, to welcome new countries into the EU.

This vision of flexibility and co-operation is not the same as those who want to build an ever closer political union – but it is just as valid. And if we can't persuade our European partners to share this vision for all we certainly need to find a way to allow this vision to shape Britain's membership.

So I can tell you today, that as part of our renegotiation I am asking European leaders for a clear, legally binding and irreversible agreement to end Britain's obligation to work towards an ever closer union. That will mean that Britain can never be entangled in a political union against our will or be drawn into any kind of United States of Europe.

We also need to ensure that – while the European Parliament plays an important role there is a more significant role for national parliaments, including our own Parliament right here at Westminster. It is national parliaments, which are, and will remain, the main source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU. It is to the British Parliament that I must account on the EU budget negotiations, or on the safeguarding of our place in the single market. Those are the parliaments which instil respect – even fear – into national leaders. So it is time to give these national parliaments a greater say over EU law-making.

We are not suggesting a veto for every single national parliament. We acknowledge that in a European Union of 28, that would mean gridlock. But we want to see a new arrangement where groups of national parliaments can come together and reject European laws which are not in their national interest.

We also need to address the issue of subsidiarity – the question of what is best decided in Brussels and what is best dealt with in European capitals. We believe that if powers don't need to reside in Brussels, they should be returned to Westminster. So we want to see the EU's commitments to subsidiarity fully implemented, with clear proposals to achieve that.

In addition, the UK will need confirmation that the EU institutions will fully respect the purpose behind the justice and home affairs protocols in any future proposals dealing with justice and home affairs matters in particular to preserve the UK's ability to choose to participate.

In addition national security is – and must remain – the sole responsibility of member states while recognising the benefits of working together on issues that affect the security of us all.

Finally, in this area, people are also frustrated by some legal judgments made in Europe that impact on life in Britain. Of course, this relates as much to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as the European Union. Which is why we need to act on both fronts. So we will reform our relationship with the ECHR by scrapping Labour's Human Rights Act and introducing a new British Bill of Rights.

We will – of course – consult on how to make this big constitutional change. The consultation we will publish will set out our plan to remain consistent with the founding principles of the convention, whilst restoring the proper role of UK courts and our Parliament. And as we reform the relationship between our courts and Strasbourg, it is right that we also consider the role of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. So – as was agreed at the time of the Lisbon Treaty – we will enshrine in our domestic law that the EU Charter of Fundamental rights does not create any new rights. We will make it explicit to our courts that they cannot use the EU Charter as the basis for any new legal challenge citing spurious new human rights grounds. We will also examine whether we can go one step further. We need to examine the way that Germany and other EU nations uphold their constitution and sovereignty. For example, the Constitutional Court in Germany retains the right to review whether essential constitutional freedoms are respected when powers are transferred to Europe. And it also reserves the right to review legal acts by European institutions and courts to check that they remain within the scope of the EU's powers, or whether they have overstepped the mark. We will consider how this could be done in the UK.

Immigration

Fourth, we believe in an open economy. But we've got to be able to cope with all the pressures that free movement can bring – on our schools, our hospitals and our public services. Right now the pressures are too great. I appreciate that at a time when other European countries are facing huge pressure from migration from outside the EU, this may be hard for some other EU countries to understand. But in a way these pressures are an example of exactly the point the UK has been making in recent years.

For us, it is not a question of race or background or ethnicity – Britain is one of the most open and cosmopolitan countries on the face of the earth. People from all over the world can find a community of their own right here in Britain.

The issue is one of scale and speed, and the pressures on communities that brings, at a time when public finances are already under severe strain as a consequence of the financial crisis. This was a matter of enormous concern in our recent general election campaign and it remains so today.

Unlike some other member states, Britain's population is already expanding. Our population is set to reach over 70 million in the next decades and we are forecast to become the most populous country in the EU by 2050. At the same time, our net migration is running at over 300,000 a year. That is not sustainable.

We have taken lots of steps to control immigration from outside the EU. But we need to be able to exert greater control on arrivals from inside the EU too. The principle of the free movement of labour is a basic treaty right and it is a key part of the single market. Over a million Brits benefit from their right to live and work anywhere in the EU. We do not want to destroy that principle, which indeed many Brits take for granted. But freedom of movement has never been an unqualified right, and we now need to allow it to operate on a more sustainable basis in the light of the experience of recent years. Britain has always been an open, trading nation, and we do not want to change that. But we do want to find arrangements to allow a member state like the UK to restore a sense of fairness to our immigration system and to reduce the current very high level of migration from within the EU into the UK. That means first of all correcting the mistakes of the past by ensuring that when new countries are admitted to the EU in the future free movement will not apply to those new members until their economies have converged much more closely with existing member states.

Next, we need to create the toughest possible system for dealing with abuse of free movement. That includes tougher and longer re-entry bans for fraudsters and people who collude in sham marriages. It means addressing the fact that it is easier for an EU citizen to bring a non-EU spouse to Britain than it is for a British citizen to do the same. It means stronger powers to deport criminals and stop them coming back, as well as preventing entry in the first place. And it means addressing ECJ judgments that have widened the scope of free movement in a way that has made it more difficult to tackle this kind of abuse.

But ultimately, if we are going to reduce the numbers coming here we need action that gives greater control of migration from the EU. As I have said previously, we can do this by reducing the draw that our welfare system can exert across Europe. To those who say that this won't make a difference. I say look at the figures. We now know that, at any one time, around 40 percent of all recent European Economic Area migrants are supported by the UK benefits system with each family claiming on average around £6,000 a year of in work benefits alone and over 10,000 recently-arrived families claiming over £10,000 a year.

We need to restore a sense of fairness, and reduce this pull factor subsidised by the taxpayer. So I promised 4 actions at the election. Two have already been achieved. EU migrants will not be able to claim Universal Credit while looking for work. And if those coming from the EU haven't found work within 6 months, they can be required to leave. But we need to go further to reduce the numbers coming here. So we have proposed that people coming to Britain from the EU must live here and contribute for 4 years before they qualify for in work benefits or social housing. And that we should end the practice of sending child benefit overseas.

Now, I understand how difficult some of these welfare issues are for other member states. And I am open to different ways of dealing with this issue. But we do need to secure arrangements that deliver on the objective set out in the Conservative Party manifesto to control migration from the European Union.

The 4 objectives

So these are the 4 objectives at the heart of our renegotiation.

Objective 1: protect the single market for Britain and others outside the eurozone. What I mean by that is a set of binding principles that guarantee fairness between euro and non-euro countries.

Objective 2: write competitiveness into the DNA of the whole European Union. And this includes cutting the total burden on business.

Objective 3: exempt Britain from an 'ever closer union' and bolster national parliaments. Not through warm words but through legally binding and irreversible changes.

And objective 4: tackle abuses of the right to free movement, and enable us to control migration from the European Union, in line with our manifesto. The precise form all these changes will take will be a matter for the renegotiation. But I want to be very clear: if we are able to reach agreement, it must be on a basis that is legally-binding and irreversible and where necessary has force in the treaties.

The negotiation

Now there will be some in Britain who say that what we are asking for is far too little. And there will be some in European capitals who say that what we are asking for is far too much. I say that what I am

asking for is what is needed to fix the problems in Britain's relationship with the European Union. And that these measures, if adopted, will benefit the European Union as whole.

I have been prime minister for five and a half years. I have sat in 39 European Council meetings with my fellow European leaders. I have seen this relationship operating at close quarters; I see how much Britain can gain from its membership of the EU. And I have seen where the problems lie.

I have thought very carefully about what is needed to fix those problems, and I have come up with a carefully-designed package to do so. It is not outlandish or absurd. It is right, and it is reasonable. But I must be very, very clear. I don't want this reasonable approach to be misunderstood.

Reasonable does not mean lacking in resolve. I understand, of course that every negotiation must involve just that – negotiation. But Britain is the second biggest economy in the EU. We are the second biggest contributor to the EU budget. Along with France, we are its foremost military power. We gain from the union, but we bring a lot to it. We believe very strongly that if a major member state has major concerns – concerns which it has been voicing in a measured and constructive fashion over a number of years – then it is entitled to expect those concerns to be addressed.

At the heart of this negotiation is actually a very simple question: is the European Union flexible enough to accommodate the concerns of its very different member states? The answer to that question must be yes, if the EU is to survive and prosper in the future – not just for Britain today, but for other member states, large and small, north and south, or the east or the west. The European Union has reached a decisive moment.

Now is the moment to ensure that membership of the European Union works for euro and non-euro members alike. I think most people would find that an eminently reasonable proposition. Already there have been productive rounds of talks with every European leader with the presidents of the European Council and parliament and of course with the president of the European Commission who has made this issue a priority and pledged his support for a fair deal for Britain. So I have every confidence that we will achieve an agreement that works for Britain and works for our European partners. And if and when we do so, as I said 3 years ago, I will campaign to keep Britain inside a reformed European Union, I'll campaign for it with all my heart and all my soul, because that will be unambiguously in our national interest.

But if we can't reach such an agreement, and if Britain's concerns were to be met with a deaf ear, which I do not believe will happen then we will have to think again about whether this European Union is right for us. As I have said before – I rule nothing out.

Best of both worlds

And to the British people I say this. We have a long history of engaging with the best parts of what membership of the European Union has to offer the parts that work for Britain, and our own history and traditions. Already, we have ensured that as British people, we can travel freely around Europe, but at the same time we have maintained our own border controls. We have kept our own currency while having complete access to the single market. We cut the EU budget for the first time ever, while protecting the British rebate. We successfully took Britain out of the eurozone bailout mechanism – the first ever return of powers from Brussels to Westminster. Through our opt-out from justice and home affairs matters, we have achieved the largest repatriation of powers to Britain since we joined the EU. And when we have had to, we have used our veto – as I did to block a treaty that wasn't in Britain's national interest. In other words, we have shown before that it is possible for Britain to find a way that works for us.

And I believe that we can do so again and that through this renegotiation we can have the best of both worlds. We do not need to choose between being a marginalised voice within Europe or an isolated voice outside it.

Let me explain what I mean.

Rejecting the status quo

Those who believe we should stay in the EU at all costs need to explain why Britain should accept the status quo. I am clear that there are real problems for Britain with the status quo. There are some economic risks, if we allow a situation where eurozone countries could potentially spend our money or where European regulations hold back our ability to trade and create jobs. And there are also significant risks if we allow our sovereignty to be eroded by ever closer union or sit by and do nothing about the unsustainable rate of migration into our country. But just as those who are advocating staying in the EU at all costs have to answer serious questions so those who think Britain should just leave now also need to think hard about the implications of their arguments – and the possible risks of the course they advocate. What would being outside the European Union mean for our economic security? And what would it mean for our national security?

Let me briefly take these questions in turn.

Economic security

First, our economic security. Those who believe we should leave the EU, mostly argue that we would still seek a relationship with the single market and that we would still build trade deals with the rest of the world.

So the question is how exactly would this work? On the single market, some have suggested that we could be like Switzerland or Norway. These countries are great friends of ours – but they are also very different from us. Switzerland has had to negotiate access to the single market sector by sector. Norway is part of the single market but has no say in setting its rules: it just has to implement its directives. 10,000 rules and regulations in the last 20 years, 5 for every day the Norwegian Parliament has been sitting. So the irony is that if we followed the model of Norway, Europe's political interference in our country could actually grow, rather than shrink. Because here's the rub. The single market has rules. We will not always get what we want from those rules. But we have more influence over them from inside the EU, where those rules are actually made.

And on trade, those who advocate Britain leaving need to explain how the league of 1 will compare with the league of 28. Negotiating as part of an economy with 500 million people gives us more power as a country, not less. Our membership of the European Union gives us free trade agreements with more than 50 countries around the world. Trying to recreate all of these deals from scratch on our own would not be a quick or easy process. So we should be clear that leaving the EU is not some automatic fast track to a land of milk and honey.

National security

Just as there are difficult questions for our future prosperity outside the EU so there are also important questions for our future security too. In 2015, our membership of the European Union is not just a matter of trade and commerce, of pounds and pence. It is about our national security as well as our economic

security. The world is undoubtedly a more dangerous place than when I made my speech at Bloomberg 3 years ago. Then, ISIL didn't exist. Now it controls substantial territory in Iraq and Syria and directly threatens our country. Then, Ukraine was at peace. Now it is in crisis, after Russia invaded Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. And of course the war in Syria has unleashed a wave of migration towards Europe which we see night after night on our television screens. Britain has never joined the Schengen border-free zone, so we retain our border controls. This, and our geographical status as an island, means we are less directly affected than other European countries by this crisis.

Our agreement with France, as a fellow EU member, means that our main border control with continental Europe effectively operates now at Calais, not Dover. And our decision to admit 20,000 Syrian refugees from the camps was a British national sovereign decision. But our membership of the EU does matter for our national security and for the security of our allies which is one reason why our friends in the world strongly urge us to remain in the EU. It is not just a question of strength in numbers, important though that is. The EU, like NATO and our membership of the UN Security Council, is a tool that a British prime minister uses to get things done in the world, and protect our country.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, and European leaders met, it was Britain that pushed through sanctions to penalise Russia and ensure a robust response. On Iran, it was Britain that helped impose the tough sanctions which got Iran to the negotiating table. These things were done through the EU.

The point I am making is this – if the British prime minister was no longer present at European summits, we would lose that voice and therefore permanently change our ability to get things done in the world. We have every right to do that as a sovereign nation. But we should do so with our eyes open.

Britain's future

I am not saying for one moment that Britain couldn't survive outside the European Union. Of course we could. We are a great country. The fifth largest economy in the world. The fastest growing economy in the G7 last year. The biggest destination for foreign direct investment in the EU. Our capital city a global icon. The world, literally, speaks our language. Last month the president of China spent a week in this country. This week the prime minister of India will visit. They see a great future for this country that we all love. No one doubts that Britain is a proud, successful thriving country. A nation that has turned round its fortunes through its own efforts. A far cry from the 'sick man of Europe' at the time we entered the European Economic Community 4 decades ago.

Whether we could be successful outside the European Union – that's not the question. The question is whether we would be more successful in than out? Whether being in the European Union adds to our economic security or detracts from it? Whether being in the European Union makes us safer or less safe? That is a matter of judgment. And ultimately it will be the judgment of the British people in the referendum that I promised and that I will deliver. You will have to judge what is best for you and your family, for your children and grandchildren, for our country, for our future. It will be your decision whether to remain in the EU on the basis of the reforms we secure, or whether we leave. Your decision. Nobody else's. Not politicians'. Not parliament's. Not lobby groups'. Not mine. Just you. You, the British people, will decide. At that moment, you will hold this country's destiny in your hands.

This is a huge decision for our country, perhaps the biggest we will make in our lifetimes. And it will be the final decision. So to those who suggest that a decision in the referendum to leave would merely produce another stronger renegotiation and then a second referendum in which Britain would stay I say think again. The renegotiation is happening right now. And the referendum that follows will be a once in a

generation choice. An in or out referendum. When the British people speak, their voice will be respected – not ignored. If we vote to leave, then we will leave. There will not be another renegotiation and another referendum. So I say to my European counterparts with whom I am negotiating. This is our only chance to get this right – for Britain and for the whole European Union. I say to those who are thinking about voting to leave. Think very carefully, because this choice cannot be undone.

And to those who are campaigning to leave but actually hoping for a second referendum – I say decide what you believe in. If you think we should leave – and leave means leave – then campaign for that and vote for it. But if you are actually arguing for a better relationship between Britain and the European Union, then don't campaign to get out. Work with me to get that better deal for Britain.

Conclusion

And so? I have set out today the changes I want to see, and which Britain needs to see. There will be those who say – here and elsewhere in the EU – that we are embarked on 'mission impossible'. I say: why? I do not deny that seeking changes which require the agreement of 27 other democracies, all with their own concerns, is a big task. But an impossible one? I do not believe so for a minute. When you look at the challenges facing European leaders today, the changes that Britain is seeking do not fall in the box marked 'impossible'. They are eminently resolvable, with the requisite political will and political imagination. The European Union has a record of solving intractable problems. It can solve this one too. Let us therefore resolve to do so. Because the prize is a big one. A new kind of European Union.

A European Union which could lead the world in competitiveness, be a magnet for start-ups, a beacon of jobs and growth. A European Union in which those countries inside and outside the euro could both have their interests fully protected. A European Union, which could recognize the different visions of its members, and celebrate their diversity as a source of strength. A European Union in which those who wished to proceed towards a political union could continue to do so but where it would have been clearly accepted that Britain would not take part in such an endeavour. A European Union in which the United Kingdom could exert greater control over the numbers coming to our country.

In other words, a European Union with the flexibility needed to ensure that all its members felt their particular membership worked well for them and our British model of membership worked well for us. I have no doubt that with patience, with goodwill, with ingenuity, it can be done. And that in doing so we can make Britain and the whole of Europe safer and more prosperous for generations to come.