

[EU derision time](#) [1]

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The EU Federalists have already written the script for the UK's new relationship as an 'associate member'. We will be subject to all the regulations and costs of EU membership without any influence or voting rights. That is roughly the deal Norway currently has.

So is this decision time as we choose between attractive alternatives or derision time as we crawl pathetically back into our hutch?

The Federalists believe the UK has little negotiating room and Cameron will be out of office before the talks get tough. At the next election, UKIP will not be taking many, if any, Westminster seats but they will be drawing away the key marginal voters. Any Lib Dems remaining will undermine negotiations.

So is the EU now a lost cause? If it was left to the FCO, it certainly would be. Our diplomats have no blueprint of an EU, nor of an exit, that we would like, nor any plan to achieve either of them.

What can we do? Cameron needs to agree the seriousness of the issue with Milliband - forget Clegg. The UK's national interest needs a negotiating team and a strategy that will survive the next election whatever the outcome. The team should work in secret and bring together some of the more thoughtful MPs and MEPs, both Conservative and Labour, as well as the City - our most crucial economic interest. Unfortunately it will also need diplomats, but retired ambassadors rather than serving civil servants, because it will be essential to know the extent to which we can bring other EU members along with us.

The team should be given a year, no more, to come up with an A and a B scenario to compare with scenario C, and plans to achieve A and B:

- A. What is the best 'staying in' deal we can reasonably expect to achieve?
- B. What is the best 'opting out' deal we can reasonably expect to achieve?
- C. If we are blocked from both of those and continue to be dragged, whingeing, along, how will that look?

A referendum should be deferred until we are ready but that is easy. If a premature referendum comes to the wrong answer, have another a year later.

We can win this campaign but not if we continue to deal with the EU in the manner we have for the last 40 years. If we lose this campaign it will resemble our last Eurovision Song Contest entry: a tired old gent being derided by a bunch of countries with whom we have lost touch.

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