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How not to start negotiations with the EU [1]

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David Cameron is expected to make his long awaited EU policy speech shortly. We are told it will be radical and bold. The consequence, we are told again, will be a major renegotiation of our EU terms or departure with our head held high. That choice will be for the UK to make on the basis of an in/out referendum.

Cameron is in the weakest negotiating position of any British Prime Minister since Edward Heath. With her Bruges speech, Thatcher turned us from a respected contributor to a moaning Minnie, complaining at every step of the EU way and thereby alienating our friends. Major dismantled what could have been a powerful trading partner for the EU leaving a rump EFTA today. He led our potential allies into the arms of Brussels. Now they want our money but not us. Blair, to appease the unions, gave away John Major?s opt-outs and, to curry favour with new EU members, much of the Thatcher rebate. Brown handed City regulation over to Brussels.

So far Brussels has been helpful on Scottish independence because Spain is terrified that Catalonia will go the same way. But if the Federalists can use Scottish independence as a further way to undermine the UK position, they surely will.

The track record of our City, regulators and civil servants has been weak. Much of the EU treaty and regulatory wording has been drafted by our people. They claim, naturally, that the treaties and regulations are better than they otherwise would have been. From the Federalist perspective these civil servants look remarkably like a Fifth Column, advancing the EU cause under British colours.

And finally consider the witlessness of our MPs. Have any have sat down and worked out what we are trying to achieve and how that can be done? Bill Cash is thoughtful but no one listens to him any more. On fisheries, did we not sell most of our rights to Spanish fleets? Will the courts allow us to repatriate those rights without compensation and will the compensation not be higher for an independent UK?

Our MPs and our media have further alienated Brussels and other member states by blaming them for UK intervention and undermining our sovereignty when, for example, far more regulations have arisen from Whitehall and Westminster than ever came from Brussels. Transparently, it has suited Whitehall to escape the odium that should be theirs.

In short, the UK will begin the negotiations with the worst possible background.

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