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‘This House Believes the UK is Better Off in the EU’

Monday 25th April brought to the Union a lively, pivotal debate on whether the UK is better off within the EU in light of the upcoming referendum on June 23rd. On the proposition **Charles Clarke**, past Home Secretary and MP for Norwich South, and Council Member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, kicked off the debate by congratulating the House for holding this timely debate, and arguing that while the EU has admittedly failed in relation to the refugee crisis, its multiple strengths mean that to leave would be to ‘pull out at our Peril’.

Harsimrat Kaur, a leading light within Women for Britain, then responded to the proposition by giving the Brexit campaign an interesting twist, with an impassioned speech on the positives of global immigration and the damage of an immigration policy rooted in the EU system. She indicated the future risks of staying in, most importantly ‘the risk of being at the table, and not having a voice’. She concluded by declaring that when ‘we leave the European Union, we join a bigger team. We join the world.’

Nick Boles, a Conservative MP and Minister of State for Skills, opened by saying that, unlike many within this debate, he is ‘not motivated by passion. I’m not in love with the European Union’. He put forward the economic argument, stating that ‘uncertainty kills investment’ and that ‘leaving the EU will have a negative impact on economic growth.’ He concluded by asserting of the ‘Leave’ campaign that ‘the benefits they pretend to offer are illusory.’

This view was taken on by national organiser of Vote Leave **Stephen Parkinson**, who responded to the economics-based argument of Nick Boles by ridiculing Charles Clarke and Paddy Ashdown for wanting to join the Euro, and said of the Stay Campaign, ‘there’s a lot of apocalypse’. On the ‘queue’ for trade deals that Obama referenced, he revealed that there was only one country that the US was currently in trade negotiations with: ‘Whether you call it a line or you call it a queue – it’s not very big, is it?’ He closed by imploring the House to ‘Look at the price we are paying for the failure of these dying dreams.’

Charlotte Vere, leader of Conservatives IN, focussed her speech upon the failures of the Leave Campaign, describing them as ‘A very small group of people who are trying and failing to make a new nation but the real world keeps interfering.’ She closed by saying that if we stay within the EU, ‘We will remain one of the great trading nations that Britain has always been.’

In response to this, **Sir Charles Crawford**, a former British diplomat known for his ambassadorial work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, spoke of the wastes of bureaucracy and the fact that the European Union has gotten too big. He informed that house that ‘the Eurozone... was built on a lie’. He went on to say ‘how exactly it will crash cannot be predicted... but it is going to change dramatically, and it may not change peacefully,’ and closed by warning the House, saying ‘Listen folks, we’re on the Titanic.’

Closing for the proposition, former leader of the Liberal Democrats **Paddy Ashdown** gave an impassioned speech on this issue, declaring that ‘this is a crisis moment.’ On the refugee crisis, he declared that ‘We are taking not a single one of the refugees currently fleeing the battlefields in Syria. This government is proud of it; I am ashamed of it!’ He closed with a warning about national security: ‘ISIS is a network; to challenge this network we need our own network.’

Nadhim Zahawi, CEO of YouGov, closed for the opposition with a focus on business: ‘Smaller businesses want to innovate. Europe thwarts that innovation. He also made clear his lack of faith in ‘the tyranny of the bureaucracy in Europe.’

This brought the debate to a close. There had been convincing statistics on both sides, emotive personal stories and of course heated debate about the implications for the British economy, trade, immigration and sovereignty.

Debate Result

Ayes: 81.3%

Noes: 9.3%

Abstentions: 9.3%

The motion carried.

By Anna Bockmuehl
Head of Press, Easter 2016